THE Hudson REVIEW

IRVING SINGER:
The Passion in Fidelio

JUDITH HEMSCHEMEYER:
The Plastic Hip—a story

GUY DAVENPORT:
The Man without Contemporaries

SONYA RUDIKOFF:
La Querelle des Femmes

MARCIA B. SIEGEL:
Siegfried's Revenge

Poems by STEPHEN JAMISON, GRACE SCHULMAN, JOHN N. MORRIS, LARS GUSTAFSSON, ROBERT NYE, ANNE S. PERLMAN, MICHAEL SCHMIDT.

Reviews by MARVIN MUDRICK, VERNON YOUNG, HAYDEN CARRUTH, JOHN SIMON, STEPHEN FARBER, PATRICIA MEYER SPACKS, CHARLES W. MILLARD.

VOLUME XXVII, NUMBER 2 • SUMMER 1974 • $2.50 PER COPY

GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A distinguished Mexican poet and diplomat appraises the writings of the famous anthropologist and social philosopher Claude Lévi-Strauss. Octavio Paz provides a sound introduction to Lévi-Strauss's ground-breaking studies of myth and the incest taboo, and to his major works, including The Raw and the Cooked. *Mr. Paz defines and criticizes Lévi-Strauss's particular brand of structural anthropology—principally his concept of culture as a "total system of communication." Paz further identifies the Marxist, Freudian, and Buddhist strands in Lévi-Strauss's thinking and contrasts his use of the Marxist view of history with Sartre's.*

Now in paperpack

Claude Lévi-Strauss
An Introduction

Octavio Paz

"Paz, one of the most brilliant writers of contemporary times . . . has obviously devoted considerable time to the study of Lévi-Strauss's anthropological discourses. . . . Subjects such as the language of kinship systems, myth, structure of myth, psychic unity of man, meta-languages, comparative thought and the meaning of meaning are captivatingly handled. . . . Highly recommended."—*Choice*

". . . Paz perceives Lévi-Strauss's ideas in their broad philosophical implications. His book is a personal response to Lévi-Strauss rather than a didactic evaluation of his work . . . highly recommended."
—*Library Journal*

"Paz . . . is a man who thinks hard about what seems important . . . and who thinks as a nonspecialist. . . . I must praise his brilliant little book, precisely because it is intelligible 'amateur' discourse in a funhouse of forbidding professionals. But even more so because perhaps it is only the artist today who may be privileged to raise the great questions of value for us all."—*Los Angeles Times*

A DELTA BOOK
$2.25
Dell Publishing Co., Inc./1 Dag Hammarskjold Plaza/N.Y., N.Y. 10017

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Editor:

FREDERICK MORGAN

Managing Editor:

IRENE SKOLNICK

Associate Editor:

PAULA DEITZ

Assistant Editor:

CHARLOTTE WIGGERS

Advisory Editors:

HAYDEN CARRUTH
ROGER SALE
WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Associate:

EDMUND T. DELANEY

Contributing Editors:

JOHN SIMON, *Theatre*
VERNON YOUNG, *Film*
CHARLES W. MILLARD, *Art*
MARCIA B. SIEGEL, *Dance*

THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 65 East 55th Street, New York, N. Y. 10022. It is a member of The Council of Literary Magazines and of COSMEP, and is indexed in the Social Sciences and Humanities Index. Book reviews are indexed in Book Review Index.

Subscription $8.00 per year in U. S.; foreign including Canada $9.00. Single copy $2.50. U. S. distributor: B. De Boer, 188 High Street, Nutley, N. J. 07110. Subscriptions in England: B. H. Blackwell, Ltd., The Broad Street, Oxford. Back issues and reprints of Volumes I—XXV available from AMS Press, Inc., 56 East 13th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003. Microfilms of Volumes I—XXV available from University Microfilms, Inc., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106.

Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury.

Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the editors.

Printed in the United States of America. Second Class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices.

Registered U. S. Patent Office.

Copyright © 1974 by The Hudson Review, Inc.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VOLUME XXVII
NUMBER 2
SUMMER 1974

THE Hudson Review

CONTENTS

The Plastic Hip (*story*)	JUDITH HEMSCHEMEYER	171
The Night; The Mauser Leads; Frank's Journey (*poems*)	STEPHEN JAMISON	195
Running It Backward; Near the Potomac (*poems*)	JOHN N. MORRIS	202
The Other Side of Humankind; Moon; Lost Unity (*poems*)	GRACE SCHULMAN	206
Beethoven: The Passion in *Fidelio*	IRVING SINGER	209
San Francisco Sailing Further Underground; Free Fall; Darkness; Fragment; A Poem on Revisionism *(poems)*	LARS GUSTAFSSON	227
Expurgations (*poems*)	ROBERT NYE	230
In the Air (*poem*)	MICHAEL SCHMIDT	232
Summer Adjustments (*poem*)	ANNE S. PERLMAN	233
The Reclining Figure and the Development of Modern Sculpture	CHARLES W. MILLARD	234
The Friends of Graham Greene	VERNON YOUNG	245
Movie Crazy	STEPHEN FARBER	252
Theatre Chronicle	JOHN SIMON	259
Siegfried's Revenge	MARCIA B. SIEGEL	267

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reviews

La Querelle des Femmes	SONYA RUDIKOFF	273
Fiction Chronicle	PATRICIA MEYER SPACKS	283
The Man without Contemporaries	GUY DAVENPORT	296
Last Tango in Panoply	MARVIN MUDRICK	303
Poetry Chronicle	HAYDEN CARRUTH	308
Letter to the Editor		320
Notes on Contributors		

Notes on Contributors

JUDITH HEMSCHEMEYER's book of poems, *I Remember the Room Was Filled with Light,* was published by Wesleyan University Press in 1973. "The Plastic Hip" is her first published short story.

STEPHEN JAMISON,* a former student of Philip Levine, attended Stanford University for three years, and worked on and off for eight years at Big Sur State Park. He has a book in progress entitled *Aron's Room* named for a friend whom he met at Northside Psychiatric Hospital. His poems in this issue are his first published work.

GRACE SCHULMAN is poetry editor of *The Nation* and Assistant Professor of English at Baruch College. She has recently been appointed Director of the Poetry Center at the 92nd St. YM-YWHA.

IRVING SINGER is Professor of Philosophy at M.I.T. This essay will form part of a forthcoming book on the operas of Mozart and Beethoven.

LARS GUSTAFSSON* was born in Västerås, Sweden in 1936. He studied at Uppsala and Oxford; and for many years edited the influential literary magazine, *BLM*. He is a novelist and dramatist, as well as a poet.

ROBIN FULTON* is an English poet living in Scandinavia. He edits the Scottish literary quarterly *Lines Review,* and has translated the work of several Swedish poets, including Gustafsson's *Selected Poems*. His fifth collection of verse, *Tree-Lines,* is published by New Rivers Press.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ROBERT NYE,* a young English poet and critic, has published one collection of poetry in the United States—*Darker Ends* (Hill & Wang, 1969). He is the poetry reviewer for *The Times* (London) and writes a weekly article on new books for the literary pages of *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh)—for which latter periodical he also serves as poetry editor.

MICHAEL SCHMIDT* is Gulbenkian Poetry Fellow at the Manchester Poetry Center, Managing Director of Carcanet Press and an editor of *Poetry Nation*. His books include *Bedlam & the Oakwood* (1970), *Desert of the Lions* (1971), *British Poetry Since 1960—a critical survey* (editor), and two pamphlet collections of poems.

ANNE S. PERLMAN* has been a newspaper reporter in Paris and San Francisco. She currently lives in San Francisco where she is the poetry reviewer for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Her poems have appeared in various magazines and journals.

PATRICIA MEYER SPACKS's book on autobiography and fiction by women, *The Female Imagination*, will be published by Knopf in the fall. She currently holds a National Endowment for the Humanities Senior Fellowship, supporting her work on a study of relations between autobiography and the novel in the eighteenth century.

GUY DAVENPORT is the author of *Tatlin!* (Scribner's), a collection of stories, two of which appeared originally in this magazine.

Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

Fellowships are available for New York State creative artists through the 1974-75 CAPS Program. CAPS pays individual artists professional fees to create new work and participate in community services.

Painters
Sculptors
GraphicArtists
Photographers
Poets
FictionWriters
Playwrights
Choreographers
Composers
Filmmakers
VideoArtists
Multi-Media Artists

For applications write to
Creative Artists Public Service Program,
250 West 57th Street, Room 2303.
New York, New York 10019.

Application deadline: September 30, 1974.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW DIRECTIONS

WALTER ABISH/ALPHABETICAL AFRICA
A brilliant linguistic *tour de force* and simultaneously an urbane, comic novel set in an imaginary Africa peopled by murderous jewel thieves, their nymphomaniac moll, overrunning ants, and a transvestite queen who paints the continent orange. "Walter Abish has created an exciting continent of words. I admire his sly, brave, mysterious achievement."—Irving Malin. Cloth, $7.95; NDP375, $3.75

COLEMAN DOWELL/MRS. OCTOBER WAS HERE
A searing and satirical American fantasy. "I have read *Mrs. October Was Here* with horror and fascination. Once one tunes in on the author's intent, the whole mad community, and its characters seem to be converted from a nightmare into a revelation riveting one's attention not only to the futuristic fable, but to the incredibly brilliant and acid style of the author."—Victor Weybright. Cloth, $9.25; NDP368, $3.75

JOHN HAWKES/DEATH, SLEEP & THE TRAVELER
Hawkes's new novel—"a brilliant achievement, unique and elegant in form, brilliantly judged, and likely to endure as a small classic."—*The New Republic.* "I think it is exquisite and strange and rich: above all I am struck by its purity, its clarity."—William Goyen. Cloth, $6.95

NEW DIRECTIONS 28
Provocative and varied presentations of prose and poetry in the current issue of the New Directions anthology series. Prose by Walter Abish, Ryunosuke Akutagawa, Frederick Busch, Coleman Dowell, Frederick Morgan, James Purdy, Faye Sobkowsky, and Paul West. Poetry by Ernesto Cardenal, William Everson, Angel Gonzales, Carl Rakosi, Jerome Rothenberg, and Robert Sanesi. Cloth, $9.95; NDP371, $2.95

NEW DIRECTIONS 333 Sixth Avenue, New York 10014

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Early Poems 1935-1955

By Octavio Paz
Translated by Muriel Rukeyser

A bilingual edition of the Mexican poet's writings with translations by Muriel Rukeyser, William Carlos Williams, Paul Blackburn, Lysander Kemp, and Denise Levertov. "... he is a great poet, a world-poet whom we need. The poems here speak — as does all his work since — deeply, erotically, with grave and passionate involvement." — Muriel Rukeyser

160 pages $7.95

Theodore Roethke's Dynamic Vision

By Richard Allen Blessing

This definitive study of Roethke's work, written by an able critic who is also a poet, shows how Roethke gradually succeeded in making his poems vibrate with the furious rhythms of his psychic energies. Invaluable to scholars, students, and young poets struggling with the problems Roethke so effectively mastered.

256 pages, index $8.95

Indiana University Press
10th & Morton Streets • Bloomington, Indiana 47401

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ARION

A JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND THE CLASSICS

Published by Boston University

Robert Fitzgerald: "It has helped wake us up, or keep us awake, to the Greek and Latin presences among us, discriminating among their curious and valuable kinds of energy and artistry, asking fresh questions about them, challenging our wits and enriching our sense of life."

Yvor Winters: "The only truly civilized journal in the United States."

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
William Arrowsmith, D.S. Carne-Ross

EDITORS
David Armstrong, Thomas Gould, C. J. Herington, James Hynd, Bernard M. W. Knox, William Mullen, Douglass Parker

In Volume One of the New Series:
William Arrowsmith: *Aristophanes' Birds: The Fantasy-Politics of Eros* * William Arrowsmith, translator: *Nietzsche, Notes for "We Philologists"* * Norman Austin: *The One and the Many in the Homeric Cosmos* * D. S. Carne-Ross: *Classics and the Intellectual Community* * Guy Davenport: *Ezra Pound* * William Mullen: *Pindar & Athens*

$6.00 (U.S.) per volume
$7.00 (Foreign) per volume

Subscriptions Department
Boston University
775 Commonwealth Ave.
Boston, Mass. 02215

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Marriage of Contraries

Bernard Shaw's Middle Plays

J. L. Wisenthal

This reading of Shaw focuses on his habit of seeing the world in terms of contraries, a habit related to his basic rejection of absolutes, his distaste for finality. The author examines nine of Shaw's finest plays, and his commentary sheds light on Shaw's techniques of portrayal as well as his dialectical habit of mind. $10.00

Moments of Vision

The Poetry of Thomas Hardy

Paul Zietlow

Paul Zietlow breaks with the somber interpretations of the past, arguing persuasively that Thomas Hardy is on the whole a positive poet, expressing through verse the power of compassion to mitigate suffering. Hardy emerges as a poet complex in vision, subtle in style, original and grand in imagination. Many remarkable poems that have been little noticed are discussed and illuminated. $9.50

HARVARD

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 79 GARDEN STREET, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138

SOLZHENITSYN

"I think that few people having read this book would be the same as when they opened its first page. In this respect, it seems to me that nothing in Russian or world literature can compare with it."—*Roy Medvedev*

The GULAG Archipelago

Translated by Thomas P. Whitney

Harper & Row

10 E. 53rd St., New York 10022

1817

At bookstores $12.50 cloth, $1.95 paper

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAYAKOVSKY
A Poet in the Revolution
EDWARD J. BROWN
"There can be no doubt that Brown's detailed and refreshing examination is at once scholarly and eminently readable. His skillful avoidance of a severely formalist approach together with his willingness to clarify autobiographical episodes makes this book worthy of the attention both of the layman and of the specialist . . . ."—John E. Bowlt, *The New Republic* *Studies of the Russian Institute, Columbia University* $16.50

OBLOMOV AND HIS CREATOR
The Life and Art of Ivan Goncharov
MILTON EHRE
"Ehre's book will be a landmark, a beacon, showing what can be done by a Slavic scholar who combines keen intelligence, literary sensitivity, hard work, broad reading and culture, a sense of proportion and relativity, utter lack of pomposity or pedantry, and a developed capacity for empathy and human understanding." –Hugh McLean, *Studies of the Russian Institute, Columbia University* $14.50

THE AGONY OF CHRISTIANITY
and Essays on Faith
Volume 5 in the Selected Works of Miguel de Unamuno
Translated by ANTHONY KERRIGAN
Annotated by MARTIN NOZICK and ANTHONY KERRIGAN
By agony, Unamuno meant death throes—but the death throes of any doubting man all his life. Unamuno fought death, fought it alongside Christianity, whose message may be love but whose *buena neuva* or "glad tidings" is war on death. Unamuno glossed the battle, the permanent revolution against death. For him the Christian God was a "working hypothesis," but he doubted the conclusions. This was his Agony as well as his Tragic Sense of Life—which were not only books but novels of his life.
Bollingen Series LXXXV $11.00

DONNE'S *ANNIVERSARIES* AND THE POETRY OF PRAISE
The Creation of a Symbolic Mode
BARBARA KIEFER LEWALSKI
"Barbara Lewalski's book is superb. The style and strategy are splendid—she manages to elucidate from many angles without once becoming redundant, without once losing her rapid forward pace or retracing themes—or if she does retrace, the expanding effect is too powerful for the reader even to notice it. It's a major work by a major critic on a major text."—Sacvan Bercovitch $16.50

THE RESTORATION MODE FROM MILTON TO DRYDEN
EARL MINER
The third volume of Earl Miner's three-part exploration of seventeenth-century poetry focuses on Butler, Milton, and Dryden—on Butler's progressive degradation, Milton's complex magnificence, and Dryden's epic conception and conviction of reality. Professor Miner also discusses the Restoration rake poets and Restoration verse satire and the work of such lesser-known poets as Abraham Cowley and William Chamberlayne.
Cloth, $20.00; Limited paperback, $9.50

THE NOTEBOOKS OF SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE
Volume 3: 1808-1819
Edited by KATHLEEN COBURN
This third volume (in two parts) covers the period from Coleridge's first lectures on poetry, at the Royal Institution, and the inception of *The Friend*, to his last lecture in 1819. During this time, his close friendship with Wordsworth deteriorated, ending in an estranging quarrel. Coleridge's drug addiction was deepest during these years of his life, until he finally found haven in Dr. Gillman's house at Highgate.
Bollingen Series L 2 vols. boxed, $42.50

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
Princeton, New Jersey 08540

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JUDITH HEMSCHEMEYER

The Plastic Hip

I *The Slaughtered Deer*

THE SLAUGHTERED DEER is stretched out on the basement floor. My father and his friend are standing over it smoking cigars. My father's cigar looks too big for his thin, fine-boned face. He is smoking with obvious, almost exaggerated enjoyment because he doesn't get to smoke cigars at home. He is drinking whisky and his eyes are shining.

Coaxed by both men and ashamed to do otherwise, I have touched the deer. In three places: the nose, the antlers and the shoulder. And it is the last touch, the unexpectedly cold, stiff fur that makes me realize how much the dead beast must resent us.

Still, I am proud that my father has taken me with him. I sit on the stool in front of the lathe watching the tall, broad-shouldered man show my father, with loose, graceful gestures, just how he sighted, took a bead on, then shot the buck "clean through the neck so he never felt a thing." I love the way his voice gets louder and softer, higher, then lower as he talks. It almost seems as if the words he is going to say next are already hanging in the dense, smoky air around us, full and ripe as fruit on a limb, waiting for his voice to pluck them and present them to us.

A disk of light from the hanging lamp above the lathe drops straight down on the beautiful steel machine and the oily iron filings heaped about it. They look like the shorn curls of metal-headed dolls; but my father says they are "turnings" shaved from the iron shafts that his friend somehow fashions into rifle barrels. I know the friend would give me as many of them as I want, but I am too shy to ask. His name is Joe.

II *The Uniform*

It is after supper. Joe has come to say good-bye and there is a bottle of whisky on the kitchen table. For once even my mother, who is scared of whisky because her father was a drunk, has had a few sips. She is standing next to Joe. He is splendid in his lieutenant's uniform of thick, chocolate-colored wool set off by brass

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

buttons, and suddenly, with the instinct that children have for pairing off grownups in combinations that have, for one reason or another, already been rejected, I see how beautiful they look together. They both have long, well-shaped limbs, high cheekbones and those strong, long-fingered hands that seem unable to make an awkward gesture. In fact, watching his thumb and forefinger gently controlling his shot glass and her slightly spatulate index finger stretch out slowly to tap the ash off the end of her cigarette, I get the feeling that their hands are bored, but are good-naturedly condescending to perform these simple tasks because the real purpose for which they have been so carefully designed has not yet been discovered.

My own hands, like my father's, end in short, stubby fingers. When he was a boy he broke a knuckle playing ice hockey and it shows white and lumpy when he grips something hard, as he is gripping the shot glass now. He nods, yes, yes, when Joe tells all about O.C.S., how he, a mere high-school graduate, showed up those college guys, and he tries to smile at Joe's joke:

"Don't call me sir; I'm just as good as you are."

But he is almost sick with jealousy, I know. For just as he couldn't go deer hunting because of the responsibilities a family man has, so now he can't go and fight the Germans and the Japs because of us. Because of my sister and me and the baby.

Then it is time for Joe to leave.

"Be good," he keeps saying as he shakes my father's hand. "Be good. And take care of these kids for me."

He kisses my mother on the forehead and presses me and my sister against him and calls us "Liebchen." The buttons and the insignia—gold, crossed cannons because he is in the artillery—on his uniform hurt my face but I don't care. It takes both of us to carry his overcoat from the bed into the kitchen, Nana hauling the shoulders and I struggling to keep the immense fullness of it from dragging on the floor. When he is finally buttoned and belted into it he puts on his stiff lieutenant's hat, salutes us solemnly and says,

"Remember, there's a war on. Don't talk to men with bullet-shaped heads."

Then he is gone, and the house without him seems so dingy that I hurry into bed. He had kissed my mother on the forehead almost without seeming to do so, his lips just brushing against

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

some wisps of her dark hair. He kissed her on the forehead because when they were standing face to face that's where his lips touched.

III *The Censored Letter*

My father is sitting at the kitchen table reading a letter from Joe.

"Goddarn censors!" he says suddenly.

I know the word censers means those smoking silver pots on a chain that the priest swings toward the altar at Benediction. But it must mean something else too. When I ask, my father holds up the letter and I see that lines and half lines have been cut away here and there, so it looks like one of the paper doilies that the crazy—not crazy, senile, Mother says—old lady across the street cuts out by the hundreds every day. When I ask why the letter is so chopped up, my father tells me that any letter could fall into the hands of the enemy and so any information about the size, strength and movements of our troops must be cut out of it.

"So all we know is that he's in Africa."

"In the jungle?"

"In the desert. Goddarn censors."

"But they are just doing their job, aren't they?"

"I know," he sighs, and goes back to poring over the map of Africa in Nana's geography book.

I am proud of having been able to remind a grownup that during wartime each one of us has a job, that everything we do is either helping or hurting the war effort.

Joe's job is fighting the Germans.

My father's job is making shells during the day and working in the Victory Garden in the evening. He is also the War Bond salesman and the air-raid warden for our block. We have never had an air raid and probably never will have, being so far inland. The one practice raid we had was exciting at first. My father grabbed his flashlight and helmet as soon as he heard the siren, and Nana and I ran around the house pulling all the shades and turning off all the lights. Then we settled down in bed to wait, in total darkness and, after a few minutes, because our words seemed unreal when we couldn't see even the outline of one another's face, in total silence. After we stopped talking time

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

didn't pass; it lumped up and pressed against my eyes, and I couldn't help straining to hear the drone of German bombers coming closer and closer to kill us.

And even though I knew my father was near, prowling around the pitch-black neighborhood to make sure no light was showing, and my mother was even closer, huddled in the next room on the couch listening to the radio (which she had turned on very low but even so, against regulations, I was sure, because its dial was an inch-long, dim orange crescent of *light*), even though I could have reached out and touched my sister, I felt, because I suddenly realized how helpless my parents would have been in the face of real bombs raining from the sky, completely abandoned, left alone in my own darkness to struggle with my own fear.

When the "all clear" sounded my mother turned on all the lights and my father came in, hung up his helmet and lifted both Nana and me off the floor at once with one of his rare embraces. But even as his arm was tightening around me, I imagined it lying out in the back yard blown off his body, just as my legs and my head were blown off mine. A direct hit, the papers called it.

My mother's part in the war effort is to keep my father strong and healthy so he doesn't miss work. Also, she is supposed to save, save, save: save food so there will be more for our troops, save light so there will be more electric power for the munitions plants, save on clothing by patching and mending. So she patches and mends and cans her own vegetables and bakes her own bread.

But, because there has never been any money in her family or in my father's, these are things she has always done, so for her the war is easy. Except that she can't get nylon stockings.

I have lots of jobs in our struggle to defeat Hitler and Tojo. I take turns, with Nana, peeling the labels off our tin cans and stamping them flat so that the metal can be used again. I collect the tinfoil from empty cigarette packages, soak the paper off it and roll it into a ball. I have already taken a ball of foil as big as my head down to the collecting center, the drugstore, and received a dime for it.

Those are the good jobs. The other ones—not wasting a morsel of food, turning off lights when they are not being used and reminding my parents to do the same, brushing my teeth twice a day and going to bed at 7:30—are harder because they are un-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exciting and even, I sometimes think, pointless. How am I hurting Hitler by going to bed when there is still enough light outside for three more innings of baseball?

Nevertheless, I do whatever our teacher tells us to do because on the bulletin board at school each of us has a Shield of Honor made from red, white and blue construction paper. For every week we perform our health jobs perfectly—and no grownup checks on us; we must do it ourselves—a red stripe is added to the shield. For going a whole week without wasting anything, food, electricity or paper, we get a white stripe. And for buying at least one ten-cent defense stamp each day, we get a blue stripe at the end of the week. I have the highest possible number of red and white stripes on my shield. But I have only half as many blue stripes as most of the other kids because even though she knows it's important, Mother says she can't give us both a dime every day, so Nana and I have to take turns.

IV *The Poisoned Dog*

We are sitting in the livingroom of Joe's mother's house. We had to take off our shoes before we could walk on her rug, which she brought from the old country. It is gray with pink and red roses working their way across it through dark green and pale green stems and leaves. Her furniture is all in slip covers, "to keep it nice" and every tabletop bristles with a circular lace doilie worked into concentric rings of starched ruffles.

Later, if we don't ask, she will give Nana and me a cooky from the stone jar in her pantry. She has very old-fashioned ideas about when children should be allowed to talk and what they should be allowed to say. For that reason I usually stay outside when my parents visit her, snitching currants if they are in season or chasing her black and orange goldfish back and forth across the pond. The pond is shaped like a dog biscuit and rimmed with a special smooth stone. It is the only one in the neighborhood and she is very proud of it.

Today, though, I am staying inside because something interesting has happened and the grownups are talking about it. Joe's dog, a smelly old black Scottie named Lady, has been poisoned.

"How could dey do such a ting?" Joe's mother keeps saying. "How could dey do such a ting?"

She is rocking back and forth in her low, woman's rocking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chair; her arms, dimpled at the elbows, are folded across her stomach. She is short and stocky, but not fat, because she has always worked hard. She raised her three boys, did all her own housework and gardening and took in washing for twenty years to pay for the solid, red-brick house we are sitting in.

Her husband, who had a gracefully drooping Hungarian moustache and mild eyes, was a carpenter in the old country and a sweeper here, but he is dead now. In any case, it was she, the German half of the marriage, who ran the show. At first because she had to, then because she was in the habit of it, my father said, she made one dollar do the work of two. When she was young she had had all the tradesmen at her mercy because she had the unbeatable combination of striking good looks, the air of owning any place she stepped into and a fantastic eye for finding the pocket of fat in a roast or the pulled thread in a bolt of cloth. Now, even though she is old and slightly stooped, her eyes are bright blue behind her spectacles, and her hair, braided and wound in a crown around her head, is the color of thick, rich cream. She has been in America for thirty years, but because the neighborhood is full of German-Hungarians from her village in the old country, she still speaks English slowly, with a heavy accent.

"How do I tell my Choe?" she is saying to my father. "Last ting he said was 'Ma, vatch Lady for me.' "

Now I understand why we are here. She wants my father's advice about how to break the news to Joe that his dog is dead. My father stares at the rug with his elbows on his knees. Then he takes a long drag from his cigarette and says, "I'll write the letter."

As soon as she hears my father's words, relief clears the wrinkles from her forehead and softens the planes of her strong, thin-lipped face. She thought she could count on him and she was not mistaken.

My father is silent all the way home, trying to compose a letter in his head to Joe, who is in a hospital in Italy now, in traction. After they cleaned up North Africa they went to Sicily, then southern Italy, and it is there that he had his accident. He was riding to the front in a Jeep and his driver missed the bridge in the dark; the Jeep went over the embankment and turned over, pinning Joe underneath. His right hip was crushed to bonemeal but as soon as he is strong enough, he said in his last letter (which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was untouched by the censors) he will be coming back to the states, where the doctors can figure out how to make him a new one.

V *The Purple Heart and the Plastic Hip*

I am sitting on the floor of the dining room of Joe's mother's house winding up, then setting free, a mechanical Charlie McCarthy car. The car doesn't go in a straight line; it keeps stopping, bucking and rearing and every time it bucks, Charlie's staring, out-sized head pivots back and forth in bewilderment like the real Charlie McCarthy's head does when he is sitting on Edgar Bergen's lap.

It's a stupid toy and I'm much too old for it—I'm ten now and the war is over—but I know that if I go into the livingroom I will stare at Joe's leg. He is stretched against the couch, not sitting and not quite lying; his huge crutches are placed neatly on the floor parallel to the couch and under the bridge formed by his legs. His left, good leg seems to extend almost to the center of the room and his right, bad one is on the hassock.

In a calm voice, without the rising and falling, he is explaining to my parents why his right leg is so short, why he has to wear a special shoe with a four-inch sole, a shoe so heavy, he says, that it could serve as a doorstop in a hurricane.

"Simple mechanics," he is saying. "The hip is a ball-and-socket joint. Well, I had no more ball, no more socket. So the doctors in Washington went to work and rounded off what was left of my thighbone and fitted it into a plastic socket they had concocted. Of course it takes some getting used to, but after awhile I won't even need crutches anymore, they say."

"So then . . . ?" my mother asks.

"So then I'll be able to walk without crutches," Joe says patiently, talking to her as if she were a child.

If anyone else had used that tone with her, my mother would have flared up, I know. But Joe is a returning serviceman and she knows how to treat him; the magazines are full of articles advising people how to deal with returning servicemen. Never shake an ex-Marine by the shoulder to wake him up, for example, because he has been trained to whirl around and strike down anything that touches him from behind.

"Choe, tell dem about de insuring," his mother's voice says into the silence.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Insurance, Ma. Ninety dollars a month for as long as I live."

"Nothing after that?" my father asks quickly.

For a moment everything is frozen; Joe's mother stops rocking and my mother is staring at my father with a look of flat disgust. Then Joe's shoulders start to shake, his head goes back and forth, he wags his index finger at my father, opens his mouth to say something, can't get it out and collapses against the back of the couch in helpless laughter. He laughs until there are tears in his eyes, whoops of rich, pure boyish laughter that carries us all along and, finally, even compels his mother to smile cautiously. He starts to recover, has a relapse and at last is able to gasp, as he wipes his eyes with the back of his hand,

"You know, I missed you, you son-of-a-gun. For two years I've had nobody to jerk the rug out from under me at just the right time. It's good to be home. Come on, let's have a drink."

Suddenly everything is as it should be again. Joe, with a whisky in his hand, is telling my father how they chased Rommel out of North Africa and Nana and I sit and listen, almost forgetting about his leg.

"And you know how I got those Arabs to scurry?" he asks.

My father shakes his head no.

"Well, we had just cleared one town of Germans and we wanted to have a drink on it. So we went into one of their so-called cafés, but the British had beat us to it and were grabbing up all the cognac and everyone was jabbering in French. But I walked up to the bar, slammed it a little—you know, kids, like they do in cowboy movies—and roared 'Gib uns etwas zu trinken, aber *schnell*!' and that Arab turned white and clicked his bare heels together and in no time flat my outfit had all the booze it could handle."

Hearing us laugh, my mother and Joe's mother exchange smiles. They are sitting at the dining room table sipping sweet wine from cut crystal glasses. My mother runs her hand admiringly over the handmade lace tablecloth and says something. Joe's mother nods and sighs, looking old and serious again.

Then it is time to go.

"Don't get up," my mother says to Joe as she gathers our coats.

But he shoves himself to the edge of the couch, lowers his bad leg to the floor, picks up his crutches and, bracing himself on the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

handholes, heaves himself up on his good leg. He takes a little hop for balance, props a crutch under each armpit and in one long thump-swing-thump is standing in the dining room looking down at my mother.

"Choe, show dem your medal. Show dem your purple heart," his mother says.

"Ma, no."

But she comes around to where we are standing, opens the curved glass door of the heavy, carved, oak cabinet and takes a square black leather case from the top shelf. It looks like a wallet, but when she touches one edge, it springs open. And there is the medal, a dull golden disk whose raised, finely wrought inscription stands out in gleaming letters. The ribbon is just as beautifully made. It is not just cheap, shiny, Halloween-costume silk, but thick, textured, deep purple silk sewn into rich folds, wide at the top, narrowing at the bottom where the medal is fastened, then doubled back on itself and sewn around a long, gold clasp. It looks like a purple triangle or, I see suddenly, a purple heart.

As I stand staring at it, a shaft of sunlight comes through the window, gilding a stream of dust motes. They are exquisite, marvelous as the Milky Way, but I know from experience that they will disappear if I walk toward them with my hands open trying to touch them.

"Well, Liebchen," Joe says, snapping the case shut, making me jump. "What are you trying to do, memorize it?"

He pulls me toward him to embrace me, but my fear of bumping against him and hurting his bad leg makes me stiffen, so he lets me go.

Then we go through the kitchen and out the back door. In the car Nana says, "She didn't give *us* anything to drink. Not even a cooky either."

"She forgot," says Mother. "All she can think about now is Joe."

"He told me that when the friction wears his hip socket away they can operate once more and replace it, but only once more," my father says.

Maybe they will invent stronger plastic by then, I think, but I don't say it. Scientists must already be working on it. Indestructible plastic hips that will be better than hips of bone. Maybe.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VI *The Kitchen*

We have moved. Thanks to the War Bonds my father bought through the payroll-deduction savings plan, we have our own house now, a two-story stucco house that is just as solid as Joe's mother's house. Of course we don't have a fishpond but we have a pine tree and three good-sized maples, and Mother is going to put in a bed of strawberries in the spring.

Now it is the dead of winter and blizzarding again; Nana is practicing her violin and the little ones and I are pressed against the window watching the snow swirl through the circle of light formed by the streetlamp on the corner. Suddenly I notice a car pulling up in front of the house, Joe's car. Who else would risk driving in such weather?

My mother and father are reading the paper, but when I tell them "Joe is here," my father jumps up and says, "I'd better go help him in. Come on, Martie."

By the time we put on our boots and jackets and get out to the car we find that Joe, who doesn't use his crutches anymore, has fallen into a snowbank and is just lying there, cursing softly. When he sees us he smiles, hands me a bottle of whisky—it sloshes, so it must be half empty—from inside his jacket and props himself up as well as he can in the snow, so that my father, by crouching down and putting his shoulder under Joe's arm, can heave him to his feet.

Once in the house he shakes off my father's help and strides across the kitchen with that lunging step-dip-step that startles me anew every time I see it. He takes off his hat to my mother, drops it on the floor, settles himself in his favorite chair and with his long index finger, taps a spot on the kitchen table in front of him where he wants me to set the whisky. Then he bows his head and stares at the flower pattern on the oilcloth, smiling a sweet, private smile.

"Now, as I was saying. . ." he begins.

My father gets two shot glasses from the cupboard and sits down next to Joe. My mother starts to leave the kitchen. Sensing her movement, Joe jerks his head up and roars,

"Sit down, woman! I haven't finished yet!"

From the darkness of the front hall—where I am hovering because I don't quite have the courage to go into the brightly lit kitchen where Joe might notice me—I can see a strange look pass

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

over my mother's face. Anger at being shouted at struggles with pleased embarrassment at being commanded, really commanded for once, by a man. Then her lips twitch and she says,

"I'm going to put my kids to bed."

"Well, you'd better get right back down here," he calls after her, "or so help me, I'll. . . ." Then he laughs.

He had better watch out. He's not a returning serviceman anymore. He has been home more than two years now and still hasn't grabbed hold of anything. Of course he gets his pension and his mother takes good care of him, so there is no hurry. But ever since he's been off crutches and able to drive his car again, he has been going from tavern to tavern almost every night, drinking till closing time.

He doesn't do all his drinking in taverns, though; about once a week he comes to our house with a bottle of whisky and doesn't leave until it is finished, sometimes three, sometimes four in the morning. And he always wears the same clothes, as if when he got out of the army, he traded his splendid lieutenant's uniform for this drab one—gray workpants, a gray workshirt open at the throat, his gray fedora and his red and black lumber jacket. More often than not, probably because he is so used to drinking in bars, he leaves his jacket on all night as he tips up shot after shot and talks and tries to get my father to argue with him.

Nana and I have to go to bed at nine. But from our bedroom upstairs we can hear his voice going on and on, now rising in pitch and volume, suddenly dropping down to a whisper, then rising again, like an expensive record player that can be finely tuned with knobs. Sometimes, when things get too much for him, he brings his fist down on the table to make a point. Then my mother's voice can be heard, and though I can't make out the words, I know she is telling him not to wake the kids and offering to make him some coffee even though she knows he will refuse.

About eleven o'clock she comes up to bed. But Joe stays on and my father keeps vigil with him until the bottle is empty. Sometimes it takes all night and then my father, who has to be to work at 6:30, just splashes water on his face, changes his shirt, packs his lunch, eats a cold breakfast and takes the early bus to the plant. That way he gets out of the house before my mother comes down and tells him how foolish he is. On those days she worries until he gets home for fear that, dulled and drowsy, he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

will lose a finger or a hand in one of the machines. And when he does show up, tired but safe and sound, she hides her relief by scolding him for letting Joe wreck his sleep.

"*He* can sleep till noon," she says. "*He* doesn't have a steady job or four kids to support and house payments to make."

"What kind of steady job could he get?" my father asks. "He can't sit at a desk and he can't stand at a machine and you know yourself how good he can walk."

That usually quiets her down and there is no more talk about Joe until the next time he comes over with his bottle of whisky to upset the dull routine of our household with another of the urgent, parabolic monologues that light up my childhood like the flashes of artillery fire that he once rained down against the Germans.

Sometimes it's music. Or the geography of the Arab soul. Or woman. And it starts simply, as it did the time he raised his head to down his first whisky (not his first whisky of the evening, of course, but his first at our house) and noticed that I had had my hair cut.

"A woman should never cut her hair," he thundered, shaking his finger at me. "A woman's hair is her crowning glory and her man's delight."

I was terribly embarrassed at being called a woman—how did he know I had begun to menstruate that summer?—but I stood my ground, trying to puncture his seriousness the way my father would have done.

"I don't have a man yet," I said.

But he didn't hear me; he was already launched into a description of the Italian women, women whose thick, glossy black hair reached down to their hips and beyond, women who wouldn't dream of wearing pants, women whose every unconscious movement, every gesture proclaimed they were women.

"Even the way they accepted a chocolate bar," he said, and with one fluid motion he bowed his head and extended his hand with the heel of the palm raised and vulnerable, the fingers touching, in his attempt to imitate the gesture, "Even that was tender and dignified, even though hunger was gnawing their bellies."

The Arab women, he said, were just ankles and eyes; everything in between was covered with yards and yards of cloth. "But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they get more poetry, more melting grace from those two portions of their anatomy than the women of most countries could get from. . . ."

"Joe!" my mother warned, reminding him where he was.

He smiled at her charmingly, with his eyes as well as his mouth, and went on, sliding from the Arab women into a description of *his* woman, his own woman, and how it would be between them, how he would hold her tight, kiss her and then stand her off at arm's length and say good-bye. "Good-bye, Liebchen. I'm going and I don't know when I'll be back. . . ." But when he got back she would be waiting for him and would fold him in her arms.

On and on he went, gesturing, taking all the parts, saying things like "melting grace" and "passion" as easily as we said "Pass the potatoes," making my father dreamy-eyed and fascinating my mother against her will. For she knew what women were, and Nana and I were beginning to. We weren't like that, and something in me burned to tell him so.

But just the way he was able to sit there in my mother's clean, scrubbed kitchen and spin out his dreams—so serious, so unashamed—kept me from saying anything and even made me wish I could be what he thought a woman ought to be, some kind of softly glowing satellite revolving around the hard, hot fire of her man.

Then the phone rang and I ran to answer it. It was Joe's mother.

"Is my Choe dere?" she asked.

I put my hand over the receiver and repeated her message, accent and all, to Joe. It caught him as he was flinging his head back—that long, slant-skulled Hungarian head so different from our round ones—to empty his shot glass once more. He almost choked on his whisky, recovered and then, slowly, elaborately, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Tell her," he laughed, shaking his finger at me, "dat I am dere . . ."

VII *The Storm*

My mother has a part-time job now, to bring in extra money. Every Friday night she takes the 5:30 bus to the next town and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cooks in an Italian restaurant until midnight. My father, who is against the whole idea, picks her up after work and all the next day she is overtired and short-tempered and smells like French fries.

But this week he is working the graveyard shift at the plant and can't pick her up. She will take the last bus home, she tells Nana and me. Then she puts on her lipstick (filling out the top lip with the lipstick, pressing her lips together and then rubbing the bottom lip with the tip of her little finger), gives us some last-minute instructions about the little ones and goes down to the bus stop.

It is already snowing heavily. When my father gets up at ten o'clock it is still snowing and the weather report says it will snow all night. He tells me to find out if the buses are still running, so I peer out the hallway window until, close to 11, I see the headlights of the 10:30 bus creep by. Then he tells us not to worry, that Mother will be home in a couple of hours, but just in case, he will be working in the Brass Building, fourth floor. He puts on his chains, but even so, he has to shovel the driveway before he can get out.

Then we are alone. Nana goes to bed but I stay up to watch for the 11:30 bus. Wrapped in a sweater, I sit on the third from the bottom step and stare into the snow, which is coming down still thicker, still faster than the last time I looked out. By now there are no more yards, no more curbs or streets, and the few headlights on the highway are as slow and dim as hand-held lanterns. At midnight something goes by that could be a bus. It is moving so slowly that I can't tell whether or not it stopped. If it stopped maybe Mother (who might have quit work early because of the storm) is getting off; I check again to make sure the porch light is on.

Then, at 12:30, the phone rings. It is Mother and she is stranded, she says. She got off work at midnight and stood waiting for the bus but it didn't come, so she went back to the restaurant and called the bus company and found out they never sent out the last bus for fear it wouldn't get through. I tell her where my father is working—Brass Building, fourth floor—and she says she will call him. She tells me not to worry, to go to bed; she will get home somehow. But I am still up when she calls twenty minutes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

later. She says everything is arranged. My father called Joe, who luckily was at home, and Joe is coming to pick her up. So it may take awhile, but she will get home.

"Now go to bed," she says. "Sleep tight."

Sleep tight. The remnant of the rhyme she used to say to me every night, used to *have to* say to me every night before I could let go and fall asleep: "Good night. Sleep tight. Wake up in the morning bright."

I go to bed, but I can't fall asleep for a long time. When I do, it is a restless sleep, in which I keep dreaming that I can't fall asleep. So when the noise of Mother coming in wakes me, I am too tired to figure out if that, too, is part of the dream or if it is really Mother stamping the snow off her boots in the back hall, creeping quietly up the stairs, pulling her bedroom door shut, then crying (into the pillow, so as not to wake the kids) as if her heart would break.

The next day I can tell by her eyes, the pinched line of her lips, by the heavy, almost brutal movements of her hands and arms as she goes about her baking, that the tears were real. My father manages to spend most of the day outdoors, shovelling the walk slowly and meticulously.

It isn't until late that night, after we have gone to bed, that they talk about it. And even though I creep to the head of the stairs to listen, I already know what she is going to say. I knew when she called last night to say it was all arranged, Joe would drive her home—and how is it she didn't know?—that on the way home he would pull off the highway and stop and in the warm darkness of his car (which he drove so masterfully even when drunk), cut off from the rest of the world by the fierce, swirling storm, he would try to take her in his arms.

VIII *Boxing Gloves*

For months after that, Joe stayed away. Then one night he was there again, wearing the same gray pants and gray shirt and for the first time I noticed that his hair, too, was turning silver gray as if to match his clothing. He brought whisky, too, but this time he accepted my mother's offer of coffee and a fried ham sandwich and, between bites, made us laugh with the story of the sandwich an Italian woman had made for him during the war.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I was really afraid for her," he said. "The way she went at it. . . ."

Then he clasped an imaginary loaf of bread to his chest, sawed through it carelessly with an imaginary knife, did the same with an imaginary salami and, in between, played himself making gestures of anxiety.

Then my father got out the shot glasses and they went over their whole boyhood together, from the first day they met in grade school (my father called Joe an Österreicher but Joe didn't like the way he said it: "Aye-striker," and besides, he was an American, so they had a fist fight) to the time they were driving and drinking home-made wine and got so drunk that the road seemed to be pasted right up against the windshield so they stopped the car and got out and hung onto the grass so they wouldn't fall off.

After that he started coming over regularly again, so that almost every week my father would lose a night's sleep and my mother would scold him the next day. But I still loved to listen to him talk—tearing into the county's "so-called sportsmen" for hunting by shining their headlights on a back road at night, dazzling the deer or cussing out our local squire, Mr. Bauer, for docking his horses' tails and putting irritants between flesh and hoof so they would lift their feet high at the horse shows and win blue ribbons for his kids. Of course once he got started on animals he would remember Lady and tell my father again that the reason he was staying in this town was to find out, if it took him all his life, who had poisoned her.

"Besides, what else have I got to do?" he asked, staring into his whisky, and no one answered him. The war had been over for six years now, and there were no pretences, anymore, that Joe, with his brilliant mind, would go to college somewhere on the G.I. Bill. Nights he drank; mornings he slept and in the afternoons he worked on his guns or fooled around with his boat, a small cabin cruiser he drove as far out on Lake Michigan as the Coast Guard let him.

One night when he was talking about his poisoned dog again, I made the mistake of thinking that music would cheer him up. I sneaked into the next room and put "Rhapsody in Blue" on the record player that Nana and I had got for Christmas, and from the opening wail of the clarinet, Joe took it personally.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's a man," he said, using the kitchen table as an imaginary keyboard, bending over it the way Oscar Levant was shown on the record cover bending over his piano, "Now, do you hear, he's fighting toward it, up, up, and he thinks he'll never make it but now, now at last he has it."

He smiled as the music swelled and the man triumphed and he swayed back and forth at his "piano" as the slow, wide-open lyric section began.

"There. He's dancing with her now, just moving along. . . ."

"Shittin' in tall cotton," my father put in because he thought Joe was getting too worked up.

But Joe didn't hear. He had his eyes shut now and as the music broke up into choppy rhythms again he shouted, "Watch out! The ice is breaking up and he's got to leap from chunk to chunk. And he does! Again! But the river is swirling, lapping at his heels. It wants him but he leaps, leaps once more and falls and it closes over his head and he's gone."

The record was over; the record player clicked off, but Joe was still stabbing at the table with his long fingers.

"That's what it's supposed to be," he thundered, "that's the way he wrote it, but that Levant plays it like he had boxing gloves on. Didn't you hear? Boxing gloves! Boxing gloves! Why don't they get a real pianist, like that blind guy Alec Templeton?"

Then he made fists of his hands and started to go at the table with them, to show us how Levant played. By now tears were streaming down his face and Nana and I were scared.

"Thump. Bang! Boxing gloves."

His crashing fist hit the edge of his shot glass, the whisky spilled and Mother jumped up to get a sponge as Joe slumped back in his chair.

"Joe," she said, "don't scare the kids. It's only music."

Joe snorted and began his private, soundless chuckle that always made me uneasy because it could go either way; it could swell and roll over into real laughter that would sweep everything before it, or it could turn and kill itself and drag Joe down into melancholy.

"Don't scare the kids. It's only music," he repeated dully. "Shh! Don't scare the kids. It's only life. It's only death. It's only time creeping up behind them to grab them by the nape of the neck

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and throw them into the ditch. Shh! says the woman, the eternal woman. Don't scare the kids. . . ."

He stopped then and poured himself another drink. I looked at Mother to see if she was angry because he had called her woman. But she had found a pattern in the flowers on the tablecloth, and she was watching her index finger trace it—up, down and around, up, down and around, over and over again.

IX *The Crash*

It is Saturday night, my mother and father's last Saturday night in this house, in this town because of the strike that started when I was in high school. Now, four years later, the plant is running again, thanks to strikebreakers, and most of the men have gone back to work. But not my father. He has found a job out West and they have sold the house to a scab from Michigan and are leaving in the morning. I have come home from the University for the weekend to help my mother pack.

Everything is finished now, except what the movers will do in the morning, and Joe has come over with a bottle of whisky. For the first time he offers me a drink and I accept, in spite of the look of real fear that passes over Mother's face.

Joe is taking their departure very hard. He has his second, and final, plastic hip in now and has had to sell his boat because he can't manage the painting and repairs anymore. He has been coming over almost every night for weeks, my father says, drinking, drinking and trying to get my father to promise not to go. Now he knows it is too late and is sipping his whisky silently. For once we are sitting in the livingroom, partly because the chairs are softer and we are all exhausted, but also, I think, because the kitchen, where so much has been said, is too powerful for them tonight.

Stripped of its plants and books, rugs and bric-a-brac and with only Venetian blinds left on the windows, the livingroom doesn't seem to belong to us anymore, but to the scab family that will live here the day after tomorrow. Its walls echo as soon as someone starts to talk and the bare floor seems enormous. For a long time, no one says anything. Joe stares around restlessly and then, with his elbow on his good knee, bends his head down and runs his fingers through his hair. It is all gray now and it has receded,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so that his head looks longer than ever, almost like a sculptor's exaggeration: "Head of a Hungarian Plainsman." Suddenly he struggles from his chair and starts to pace back and forth, still stroking his hair, and I am startled, once more, at how far he sinks down every time he steps on his bad leg.

"Do you remember," he says, turning to my parents, "the night Leila was killed? Out on County Trunk Y? They called me and I went out there. . . ."

"*We* went out there. . . ." my father says.

"And they were all lined up on the floor in the farmer's parlor, George there," and he points, "and Pete Bachman and his girl there, and Leila there and George's girl next to her. And Hank standing in the doorway answering the officers' questions in that damned monotone. I can still hear him: 'Were you drinking?' 'No, sir.' 'Had you been drinking?' 'Yes, sir.' "

"He was in shock, Joe," my father says.

"He was in shock," Joe repeats, "he was in shock," as if, like someone learning a foreign language, he knows what each separate word means but he can't understand the phrase they make when they are put together.

"Do you know, she could have been with me that night, but she couldn't resist the thought of driving around in Hank's brand-new car."

My father nods wearily.

"Joe, I know," he says. "But that was thirty years ago."

But Joe goes on talking, describing what each corpse was wearing, the angle of their broken limbs on the parlor floor, the conversations, the reactions of the relatives as they arrived, every detail of the county's first spectacular car crash, in which his girl, Leila, had been killed.

The next day in the car, when I ask my parents who Leila was, my father says, "She was a girl," and my mother says,

"Leila. He could have had any girl he wanted either before Leila or after. They were all throwing themselves at his head at every dance we ever went to."

My father nods agreement, keeping his eyes on the road.

X *The Walnut Stock*

Joe's mother is lying in the small bedroom off the kitchen. She

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is dying of stomach cancer. She won't go to the hospital so Joe is nursing her, giving her cream and morphine, combing her hair, doing what he can. . . . Her other two sons are too busy to come and see her, though Joe calls them every day.

"Why don't dey come?" she asks every time she wakes from her doze and sees, by the increasing or diminishing light coming in the window that time has passed, "Why don't dey come?"

While my mother kneels by her bed rebraiding her hair, my father and Joe and I go down to the basement to talk.

"It's good to see you," Joe says, leaning against his workbench and lighting a cigar. "I haven't been out of the house for weeks. I don't even take off my clothes at night anymore, just sleep in the chair. Why, I feel naughty taking a bath," he says, and for a moment, in spite of everything, a sly smile lights up his face.

"Can't you hire a nurse?" my father asks.

"She won't have a nurse," Joe sighs. "In the old country your family helped you die and that's the way she wants it. She gets morphine every two hours now, but it doesn't help too much anymore. 'Choe, did you give me my morphime?' she asks me every five minutes. And I say, 'Morphine, Ma. Yah, I gave it to you.' Then in a little while, 'Choe, did you give me my morphime?' It's just like a litany."

"Come on down to Pokey's," my father says. "I'll buy you a drink."

Joe shakes his head. "I'll drink when she's dead," he says. "If I start now and fall down the stairs, I could lie on my back helpless as a beetle and Ma and I would croak together and the neighbors wouldn't think to look for us until the house began to stink. How long are you going to be in town?"

"Just a couple of days," my father says.

Joe shrugs. Then he shows us the guns he is working on. They are mostly repair jobs, gouged or scratched stocks that must be sanded and reworked and sights that must be realigned because the hunter knocked his rifle against a rock or a fence post.

"Half the people owning guns don't know how to use them," he says as my father, who won an "Expert Marksman" medal in his National Guard days, picks up one rifle after another to examine them.

"Look here, now," Joe says, reaching into a dark corner of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

workbench that runs the length of the basement. He pulls out, slowly, almost reverently, a gunstock grained like running water, even to the spray flying as it flows around a rock.

"Walnut," he says. "Feel it."

My father runs his hand the length of the stock.

"Smooth," he says.

"Smooth!" Joe almost shouts. "He says it's smooth! By God, I'll tell you it's smooth, smooth as a baby's hind end. Do you know how many hours I've spent sanding this beautiful son of a bitch, turning it this way and that so I can figure out where the contours should be?"

He is off! My father, pleased that Joe has been able to forget about his mother for awhile, winks at me behind Joe's back and we settle down to listen. After the stock is sanded, he says, comes the varnish. Or, if the grain is unexceptional, the checkering. This he does by clamping a magnifying glass to the stock and cutting out minute bits of wood until the design, made up of thousands of tiny raised diamonds, appears. After that the stock must be fitted to the barrel.

"And they have to fit," he says, forming smooth parallel planes in the air with his palms, "like . . . like so! Like a man and a woman. . . ."

My father clears his throat. Joe grins. He picks up a rifle and sights through the low, three-paned window over his workbench. I follow his gaze along the barrel. There, just outside, is the new grass of early summer, tulips bending in the warm wind and farther off, blue sky and the intense red, intense green of the neighbor's climbing rose bush.

Then her moaning begins, a low, spaced sound from behind closed lips. Joe lowers the gun from his shoulder, puts it carefully in his gun rack and starts up the stairs.

XI *The Curved Mahogany Bar*

My father and I are sipping some of the Chartreuse I brought back from France. I love to watch him drink; since he does it so seldom, he savors every sip, working his cheeks to spread the liquor all over the inside of his mouth before he finally swallows it.

"I bet Joe would like this," he remarks. When I ask him how Joe is, he shrugs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You know his ma died a couple of years ago," he says, "and he really went to pieces. He went from one tavern to another raising hell, until some of the saloon keepers wouldn't serve him anymore. Then of course, when he got a load on he'd call here and talk and talk. I bet he spent half his checks on long distance last year, and most of the time I couldn't even make out what he was trying to say. But one night last fall he called dead sober and that call really scared hell out of me, because I knew he was sitting there in the midst of all those guns."

Then he tells me, between measured sips of Chartreuse, that Joe called him one night and his voice was curiously flat and clear. When my father joked about it, saying, "You must be sober!" Joe told him he'd been sober for two weeks, so sober that it was like a strange new kind of drunkenness. He had been working on a gun for one of the "local Nimrods" for six months and the last two weeks he got so wound up in his work that he forgot to drink or shave, almost forgot to eat. But the gun was a beauty, as perfectly balanced and graceful as a young doe, he said. Finally there was nothing more to do to it—no more fitting, adjusting or polishing—so he called the guy who had ordered it and they agreed to meet at Pokey's that night.

When Joe got there, there was quite a crowd already, and when he took the gun from its case, they pushed around him to admire it. All except the guy who had ordered it. He stood back drinking his beer, Joe said, even though everyone could see his fingers were twitching to grab his new gun. "How much do I owe you?" he asked finally, and when Joe said, "Oh, a hundred dollars," the son of a bitch went into a shrewd peasant act and offered him $50 and a bottle of bourbon. When Joe shook his head no and started to slip the gun back into its case—"Because this time this gun meant so much to me that I couldn't give it away," he told my father, "like I'd been giving guns away for years for a slap on the back and a couple shots of Jack Daniels"—the son of a bitch said, loud, so everybody in the tavern could hear, "I can get the same thing at Monkey Ward's for $30, and they don't take no six months about it neither."

"Then," Joe said, "I got mad. I grabbed that gun by the barrel with both hands, raised it over my head and smashed it on the edge of Pokey's beautiful, curved, mahogany bar. 'There's your

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gun,' I said, and pieces of it were still flying around the tavern when I walked out."

My father stops talking, staring at his drink.

"What happened then?"

He sighs. "Then he called me up and told me and started crying. But here I am, twelve hundred miles from him. What could I do? I told him to have a drink and I held the line while he poured it. When I heard him click it against the receiver and heard him smack and sigh, I started talking, telling him how much I wished I could have been in Pokey's that night, to see the look on that son of a bitch's face when his gun hit the bar and the gunsmith turned his back and walked out."

XII *The Statue*

I am in Joe's basement workshop, sitting on the stool. There on the floor next to the furnace is the dark stain where, twenty years ago, the slaughtered deer was stretched out.

Joe is working, leaning over the lathe. The stainless steel wheels and shafts of the lathe are as mysterious and fascinating to me now as when I first saw them, and I still have a longing to "take home" some of the oily metal curls piled up around it.

Every now and then Joe stops the lathe, wipes his forehead with the back of his hand, spits tobacco juice into the brass spittoon at his feet and takes a sip of warm beer, the only thing he drinks now. Finally the shrieking of metal on metal stops; he takes the gun barrel off the lathe and shows it to me.

He apologizes for working during my visit—I can only stay a couple of hours—but he is very busy. Ever since he smashed that gun on Pokey's bar, he says, he has been swamped with orders and left to name his own price.

"I've lived here all my life," he says, shaking his head, "and I'm still trying to figure these people out."

Then he tells me about Hans Forstner, the retired farmer who lived across the highway from the Bauer's "manor." One Christmas Eve the Bauers were having a party and Hans happened to look out his front window. He noticed that one of their barns was burning so he walked across the road and knocked on their front door to tell them about it. But it was a noisy party and nobody heard the knocking, so after awhile he just gave up and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

went home to bed. Here Joe pauses and becomes, for a moment, the feisty old farmer.

"And you know what he said later? 'If they don't want to come to their own fire, to hell with them!' "

And about Dutch Ebert, who got plastered in a saloon one night and decided he was hungry. So he invited a bunch of friends to go home with him for a midnight snack. 'My wife will fix us something,' he said. And when they got him home he opened the door, staggered into the kitchen and said, 'How about something to eat? I'm dynamite!' And his wife, who was up and ready for him, reached behind her, grabbed one of those hard summer sausages and hit him over the head with it. Felled him like an ox. . . .

While Joe talks, his hands are busy sanding a stock. My thoughts are partly on the stories he is telling me and partly on other stories, other times . . . the time my father and mother came back to visit him and he drank all afternoon and all night and into the next day, first whisky and then vodka. And when my mother, pretending not to notice his condition, asked him to go out to eat with them, asked him which restaurant was the best, he lifted his head and said, "Decisions, decisions. Like the doctors asked me, 'Do you want to sit or stand for the rest of your life?' Decisions, decisions. . . ."

"You were in Florence, weren't you?"

I realize that Joe is talking to me. How did he get from Dutch Ebert's kitchen to Florence?

"Yes," I tell him. "I was there."

"Well, you must have seen that statue of Michelangelo's, the one of David. I just finished a book about him. . . ."

"*The Agony and the Ecstasy*?"

He nods. "You know, Liebchen," he says. "I can pick up a rough chunk of hardwood and tell whether or not there's a gunstock in there. But can you imagine him looking at that 18-foot slab of marble and knowing that his David was in there?"

While he is talking he puts the gun stock aside, props himself against his workbench and, frowning slightly, turns his head to the left, rests his weight on his good leg and his right hand gently on his thigh, then bends his left arm and brings his left hand toward his shoulder in a powerful, half-clenched position: that of the dreamy marble David holding the sling. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

STEPHEN JAMISON

The Night

Aron reached into
the row of suits
hanging like candles,
as the warm air

met the strangers
awakening to see him,
his shaved scalp
blue and shining.

They saw him
gather his coat,
and heard him
chant to Jesus
of the long night,

the metal burning
like a fire
through his fingers,
the jades of rebirth
and the wire birds
of his soul.

He had been brought
for fainting to
Ward B and for his
strange chants said
in the early morning
while it was still dark,

and now in the blackness
his hands reached
for the curtain
and his shadow

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lay down
like the three strangers
stirring with him
in this room

traveling along
the window
on the warm power
that breathed from the men,
that clustered on the beards
and on the still hands.

The grapes of lights
far down the road
came toward him,
the quiet moon
which wrinkled so often
near his fingertips
in water
moved and wrinkled now
on the night.

He saw
a rabbit caught
in headlights
like the rabbit
that came to his home
in Brawley,
breathing in a cluster
of its paws
green eyes shining.

He came back
to the shadow of his brown body
along the wall,
and found the curved handles
of the drawers.

Light slipped

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

away from the basin,
light that could not
be stopped there
or washed or baptized

that breathed like him
and the men
and had its own rhythm.
In the morning
he stopped here

but at night he stooped
at the window.
The dark mineral
of the body

that made him so heavy
floated in the fields,
the toes and eyes
that spread into light
rained back now

on his body praising God
chanting the iron light
into morning.
The fig tree unfurled
its new life

clustered beyond
his breathing,
metallic, burning
at the tip of his fingers
like the heavy breath
of the strangers.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Mauser Leads

Above the cabin
they hunted.
They found the Mauser leads
in the bank
where the paper targets
blew away.

They found them
in blackberries
where the road
turned down
under trees
to their parents' cabin.
They were small
darkened barrels
to bury in the pocket.

They set them
on the wood table
in the cabin
and brought out cards.
Gun powder burned
on their fingertips,
five soiled faces,
each with its small moon.

They washed the bullets out
in the basin,
the smell running into it,
each small disc of metal
held up in the hands
to see its shape.

The strange smell
slept in their shirts,
in the small drawers
of socks,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in their pants on the floor.
It slept on the rusting nobs
of the basin in the morning.

An odor of rain
all around them
a smell under the bridge,
the smell of the moon
in the long nails,
on the faces of the wood,
each nail head in place.

They could read
all night the comic books
and watch
the hill moon
then weigh out the small leads
and smell the same smell
that came from water
to their hands.

They counted their leads again;
They set them on tables
and curled them in their fingers.
They held them when they slept.

The blueberries outside
swayed in the round bush
under the maple,
clicking
in the long barrels
of moon on the window

revolving when the leaves
moved. And the children
held the blue leads tucked
in pockets or squeezed in sleep,

smelling of the light
that aimed them,
and rocked them on.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Frank's Journey

to Frank, Big Sur Lodge

Crossing the road
Frank the dishwasher said,
"What's its name?"

Frank climbed further,
past the stone
where jays flew
hardened like coins,
and crying.
"But what's its name?" he said.

Stopped by the rail
of the river,
leaning to rest,
he said, "What's its name."
Ferns on the crowns
of white stones,
granite seamed.

Climbing further,
to the small boys' cabin,
he said, "What's the name."
Tin roof on painted wood,
hosed for spiders,
the boys asleep.

Red Zita came out
from behind a tree.
"What's its name."
She hung up white
blankets between
the buildings.

The sun caught in
her red hair.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What's the name,"
he said to her.

Blue jays pounded
the grass behind him.
Old Leo, the night man,
snored in his thin room.
"What's the name," he said.

At last from
the old dishwashing
section where he stood
behind the steam
he climbed to the low
porch of the dorm.

Jays fluttered
from an eave.
The furnace hummed
and light peeked
through single boards.

He dragged his one bad leg
onto the porch. "Yeah,"
he said suddenly. "That's his name.
That's it. Davenport.
Yeah. Davenport caught the fly!
Ended the inning. Yeah!"

Trees slanting in the late sun,
the cabin light,
leg drawn up behind him,
standing on thin boards,
with his weight on his good one.
"Yeah. Yeah. Davenport.
That's his name."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHN N. MORRIS

Running It Backward

A simple flick of the switch
And his familiar figure
Steps back out of the doorway,
Out of the fond familiar arms
That now drop eagerly to her sides.
Backward he rapidly walks
On the crazy pavement
Into his car whose door
Flies into his hand at a gesture;
Expertly staring ahead, he
Reverses quickly out of the picture.

At first it is mildly funny
Watching him perform
With such cheerful address
These difficult backward
Easy forward things.
So when the whiskey
Arises into the bottle
And, smiling,
He refuses his first job
And returns the diploma
With a firm handshake,
We smile.

But suddenly
It is turning serious, we see
That he is going
Where we do not wish to follow.
That smile still on his face
But growing doubtful now,
He is climbing down
Out of his college
Through algebra and beginning French
Into a taste for Coca-Cola.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now quickly he falls
Through the grades
Into his shorts
And the birthday parties.
Though a profusion of gifts
Resume their brilliant paper,
There, as the breath returns
To him who gave it
And laughter fades
To pure expectancy,
Before the match withdraws
That seemed to lean
To seem to put them out,
Out of the dark the candles come
At once alight.

Here with a flick of the switch
It is time to be stopping,
For looking ahead
We foresee what is true
But improper to be shown:
How, soon, he is going faster,
How he lapses from language
Into helpless tears,
A rage beneath naming
Shaking him as he dwindles;
How, behind his silent scream,
He disappears
In a fury of flapping and clicking
Into the dark and shining
Whirring tiny mouth of the machine.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Near the Potomac

A family graveyard in Fairfax County

How shall I think of them,
These deep American
Ancestors of whom I know
Little except that they lived here
Or nearby most of their lives?
Surely most of their lives
Were not more interesting
Or cheerful than mine is?
Except that they lived here
Or nearby, in their destination.

Imagine one, then,
Head full of the high-sounding
Republic, thinking sometimes in Latin,
As who might live in a book,
Confidently archaic
In dignity like Adam's,
Armed in his manners;

And say to him, *Father,*
Was I your intention,
You who were yourself for years,
Not your habits as I am?
Am I what you mean,
Practicing my vacant skill
Where piece by piece the future
Assembled beyond the horizon
Visible from your hill?

At Arlington the national dead
Muse on their barbered hill.
Downstream, Mt. Vernon's
Clean museum,
Chic in death,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Blazes at the Potomac.
But no ideas
Gather about these graves;
Only now and then
A few of their ignorant children.
Here in these actual weeds
In poetical tangles
Is a family plot
Become a pointless story.

Downhill the Interstate
Searches out Richmond.
Scott's Run
Crawls in a drain,
Toils in the new dark
Toward some conclusion.
Here is a place
No longer.
This is a piece
Of a distance between.
The houses are marching.
Earthmovers, hugely georgic,
Farm the sold field.
We got our million.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GRACE SCHULMAN

The Other Side of Humankind

For Countess Catherine Karolyi, Vence

These are the hills of healed divisions;
The river we cannot see sings us awake,
Parting the mountains. I am familiar
With trees at false distances
In the clear air.

Remembering maps whose boundaries
Were scars, stitches
Of broken lines,
We grow whole—a continent
Of one color.

Twisted oaks hide
A rectangle reading,
In lapsed letters,
Chasse Interdite,
And all roads lead
To the sign
That cannot be seen.

Here, the river swims us;
We shine at moons.
Clouds whiten dark skies,
Light rings horizons after nightfall
That never seems to fall;
An ancient olive branch screens
Older stars.

Exiles, we have crossed
The solid white line
Between countries and loves
And torn selves,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Losing borders,
Questioning frontiers.

But see! Limestone terraces
Are a wall of skulls
That part like seas when you climb them,
Revealing trees,

And you stand
On your stone balcony
Framed in your chancel window,
Commanding even shadows to shed their provinces
And nightingales to sing beyond confusion.

Lost Unity

Worlds born again
In thunder, I see darkly,
My wholeness gone, how vulnerable
It is.

I am grass that has taken the form
Of your body where it has lain, losing
All other forms; and every face
Breeds yours in my quick eyes.
I lie halved: my body strives for you
As roots struggle for earth.
I remember a starfish
I lifted out the sea, rays
Lowering tiers of hollow feet
That grasped for water. I let it go,
My hand a star.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Moon

Having no fire of my own, I shine
But never burn. I receive the light.
Man and woman, I gather both
Inside of me; I am an iridescent
Question. I survive the night
Changing to grow whole
Or starving
Into halves and quarters.
If I do not feed flames,
Transparent fragments linger
After daybreak
And for brief moments
I cover the sun.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IRVING SINGER

Beethoven: The Passion in *Fidelio*

IT IS ALWAYS HAZARDOUS TO READ a composer's personality in his music; but Beethoven seems to encourage us in that direction more than any other artist. The philosophical music critic may see in Bach a baroque embellishment of Lutheran faith, in Handel a quasi-mystical love of orderliness and grand decorum, in Mozart that combination of "dramatic power and gentle sensuality" to which Stendhal refers, and so on. Beethoven's music lends itself to comparable generalizations, but also it reveals *Beethoven as a person* in a way that no previous music had ever done. The subject in his works includes the composer himself: his struggles, his problems, his life as both a man and a creative spirit. It is fitting therefore that Beethoven should become the symbol of *all* artists in the last two centuries. His scowling visage, whether on porcelain busts or teen-age sweatshirts, shows not only the genius at work but also the self-expression the modern world expects to find in the work of a genius.

The self that Beethoven expresses is, moreover, the self of one who believes passionately in self-expression. Nietzsche said that "by music the passions delight in themselves." But Beethoven's music also generates the very passions it delights in expressing. In some respects, they are even more remote from mere sexuality than they often were in Mozart. In his notebooks, Beethoven wrote: "Sensual enjoyment without the union of souls is and always will be bestial; after it there is no trace of an exalted sentiment, rather one feels remorse."[1] We need only recall Mozart's letters to his wife—playful, salacious, earthy, and innocent all at once—to see how different was the moral and aesthetic development of these two men.

Beethovian passion appears most explicitly in *Fidelio*. Though Beethoven did not write the libretto, which was derived from a play by Bouilly, he chose it out of countless texts that had been offered to him. Throughout his life he worked on overtures and

[1] *Beethoven: Letters, Journals and Conversations,* trans. and ed. by Michael Hamburger (New York: Anchor Books, 1960), p. 150.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

incidental music to various dramatic vehicles, but he never wrote another opera. *Léonore ou l'amour conjugal* had been the original title; and in Bouilly, as in the musical versions of Gaveaux and Paër, the story of Leonore's heroism served to illustrate the beauty of conjugal love. But in Beethoven the story and its moral edification become secondary. The music dominates throughout, the orchestral design overwhelming the singers on occasion. Far from serving as the illustration of anything, the work becomes the tonal *embodiment* of the abstract concepts to which it is devoted. In an anecdote that Berlioz recounts, Beethoven is said to have told Paër: "I like your opera. I think I will set it to music."[2] Though Beethoven may never have said anything of the sort, his opera gives the ideas of heroism and conjugal love a significance they can have only in *his* kind of music. It is music that subordinates everything else to the expression of passion, music that expresses passions which belong to the composer's own passionate nature.

At the same time *Fidelio* is also a religious drama, as I shall try to show. The opera is a mystic rite by which Beethoven enunciates the spiritual aspirations of a revolutionary creed. *Fidelio* is the passion according to Beethoven—in both senses of the word "passion." In this essay I shall consider first the nature of Beethoven's personal passion and then its sacramental function in his opera.

Once we approach the soul of Beethoven in *Fidelio,* we quickly come upon a series of paradoxes. Beethoven lived and spoke like a misanthrope; yet the opera idealizes the love of humanity. He never married and never seems to have enjoyed sexual love for any protracted period; yet the opera idealizes marital devotion.[3]

[2] *Cf.* "Fidelio" in Hector Berlioz, *A Critical Study of Beethoven's Nine Symphonies* (London: William Reeves, 1958). On the unreliability of the anecdote, *cf.* Edward J. Dent's introduction to his translation of *Fidelio* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. xii-xiii. For a description of Paër's version, *cf.* Winton Dean, "Beethoven and Opera," in Denis Arnold and Nigel Fortune (eds.), *The Beethoven Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), pp. 345-48. This chapter also includes useful analyses of the three versions of Beethoven's *Fidelio* (1805, 1806, and 1814). On differences between the Bouilly play and the Beethoven opera, *cf.* Michael Levey, "Leonore and Fidelio," *Musical Times,* February 1961, pp. 87-88.

[3] For the (ambiguous and inconclusive) evidence about Beethoven's love-life, *cf.* George R. Marek, *Beethoven: Biography of a Genius* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972), pp. 219-315.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He continually labored under the charge of being tyrannical with the women he knew; yet the opera idealizes the courage of a Leonore who shows her love through action rather than submissiveness. Was Beethoven using the work to compensate for inadequacies in himself? Or was he demonstrating how pitifully the world fell short of what it ought to be? In his funeral oration, Grillparzer said of Beethoven: "He remained solitary because he could find no second I." Was this because of deficiencies in Beethoven, or in the rest of mankind?

I shall not try to answer these questions, but I think it is useful to examine a typical Freudian attempt to do so. In their study of Beethoven and his nephew, the Sterbas say the following about *Fidelio:* "Leonore, after whom the opera was originally named, since she plays the principal role, appears throughout the opera in male attire; she triumphs by her courage and daring; she rescues Florestan and brings him from the darkness of the deepest dungeon to the light of day. It is unmistakable that, years later, when he saved his nephew from destruction by the evil principle —Johanna [the boy's mother]—Ludwig assumed the role of Leonore himself. And in doing so, he too was a woman in man's clothing. . . ."[4] As evidence that Beethoven's masculine sexuality was transformed into a maternal love of his nephew, the Sterbas quote from an account of something Beethoven said in later life: "He said that he had never known of a marriage in which, after a time, one or the other partner had not regretted the step, and that, of the few young ladies whom he had in earlier days wished to make his own, considering that the height of happiness, he had later remarked to himself that he was very lucky that none of them had become his wife, and what a good thing it was that the wishes of mortals often remain unfulfilled."

This way of approaching Beethoven seems to me wholly erroneous. The statement about marriage does not signify that Beethoven's love for his nephew had destroyed his interest in women; and neither does it suggest that Beethoven was himself a woman in man's clothing, or that he secretly identified with Leonore. These cynical or pessimistic remarks of Beethoven do indicate an ambivalence that is worth exploring. But it is more complex

[4] Editha Sterba and Richard Sterba, *Beethoven and His Nephew: A Psychoanalytical Study of Their Relationship* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 111.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than the Sterbas recognize, and it can more readily be understood by tracing the aesthetic function of Beethoven's idealizations in a work like *Fidelio* than by speculating about details of his unconscious which are not likely to reveal themselves after all these years of deepening obscurity.

For similar reasons, I tend to distrust other psychiatrists who reduce Beethoven's art to some underlying schizoid or psychotic condition. Notice the language that Anthony Storr uses:

> In compensation for his disappointment with, and resentment of actual human beings, Beethoven imagined an ideal world of love and friendship. . . . His music, perhaps more obviously than that of any other composer, displays considerable aggression in the sense of power, forcefulness and strength. It is easy to imagine that, had he not been able to sublimate his hostility in his music, he might well have succumbed to a paranoid psychosis.[5]

In criticizing this passage, Rollo May argues that Beethoven's "schizoid state" must have been a very constructive means for dealing with his problems or else it could not have eventuated in great music.[6] Both Storr and May assume that Beethoven's work is an escape from dangers of pathology; and this is true in the trivial sense that without his music Beethoven *might* have been just another schizoid. But then, without his music Beethoven would have had less reason or capacity to cut himself off from other people. He would not have been the Beethoven we know, and possibly not a schizoid at all. He might have been just a boisterous bourgeois, which he also was. In any event, the reductivist approach tells us very little about Beethoven's creativity. For even if his music sublimates hostile emotions, it does so by expressing them in a work of art. The ideal world of love and friendship that Beethoven imagined is more than just the compensation for resentment and disappointment. It is also a human possibility that transcends the actual world, and the artist's need to delineate it for himself is as sane or healthy-minded as any other successful manipulation of reality. I doubt that we can understand the paradoxes in someone like Beethoven if we treat him like a paranoid psychotic manque, but we may be able to

[5] Anthony Storr, *Human Aggression* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), p. 99.
[6] Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York: Delta Books, 1973), p. 17.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

elucidate his unique personality by studying the nature of his artistic idealizations.

When we concentrate upon *Fidelio* itself, we are immediately struck by the fact that Leonore is not a woman but a super-woman. She is a heroine of a sort that, for instance, Pamina in the *Magic Flute* was not. Pamina is an ordinary damsel in distress, beautiful, good-hearted, and courageous within the limits of her feminine capability. Leonore also shows the conventional female frailty, and after her confrontation with Pizarro in the second act she all but faints away. But unlike Pamina, she is always an active agent, an originator of action. She takes arms against a sea of troubles; she chooses her destiny as a liberator; and in her transvestite disguise she behaves like the traditional male hero who seeks to free his beloved from imprisonment. Leonore reverses the sexual stereotypes, defies the fate that decrees the death of her husband, and yet remains a loving woman throughout. It is clearly the image of a feminine hero, a heroic female, that intrigues Beethoven.

In his notebooks for the year 1818, when Beethoven was already forty-eight years old, he wrote: "Only love, yes, only love is capable of granting you a happy life. O God, let me find her at last, the woman who may strengthen me in virtue, who is permitted to be mine."[7] Is it Leonore whom Beethoven still hopes to find? If so, it is not surprising that he never married. Ideals have a way of never appearing on earth. If they did, they would be a new reality from which a Beethoven would always flee by creating some new ideal—a new Leonore, different from the first one but no less of an idealization. Think of the line I quoted earlier: "What a good thing it was that the wishes of mortals often remain unfulfilled." This makes sense if one has a need and even a passion for idealization, and possibly ideals are made to be elusive for the sake of generating passions that someone like Beethoven can re-create through fictional beings like his Leonore.

Being an idealization of this sort, Leonore is in principle a *distant* beloved. She is *die ferne Geliebte,* as in Beethoven's song cycle. In the distance, Novalis said, everything becomes poetic and romantic. Leonore is constructed in the dimensions not of any actual woman but of a remote possibility that stimulates the

[7] *Beethoven: Letters, Journals and Conversations,* p. 161.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

imagination, and so leads the creator to his own deeds of heroism through creativity alone. She is often associated with Goethe's *ewige Weibliche,* but that is inaccurate. For in the context of the opera, Leonore appears less as a spiritual lure than as a will to action. She is the figure of Liberty that Delacroix portrays on the barricades, her magnanimous bosom bared as she holds aloft the flag of humanistic revolution.

At the same time, one misconstrues Beethoven's humanitarianism if one fails to recognize that this too was an ideal he could hardly tolerate in reality. I am not thinking of his reputation as a domestic despot nor his ill-tempered statements about the pettiness of the human race. I am thinking rather of the airy abstractness in Beethoven's references to that Humanity which he claimed to love and for which he was writing his heroic music. Molière's Alceste, and indeed every misanthrope, can justify his hatred of men by claiming a superior and unrequited love of mankind. On that desert island to which Alceste exiles himself, what else would he do but write an opera like *Fidelio* or choral music like the last movement of the Ninth Symphony, glorifying humanity as it may some day be, provided that he does not have to endure it in its present imperfection?

The critic Paul Bekker put the matter quite precisely when he said: "What interested Beethoven was not the personal, the human, the sum of small characteristics which form an individual, but the idea incarnate in some heroic figure."[8] But other than individual people—each of whom is small, human, and personal —what constitutes "humanity"? The idea incarnate in some heroic figure is only an idea, a fiction, a dramatic fantasy. It indicates a possible direction for moral endeavour; but in itself it is not a present reality in the sense in which people that one loves or hates are real and present. One marvels at its ability to supplant actual men and women in Beethoven's imagination.

In saying this, I am not suggesting that Beethoven's attitude was undesirable, or that he is deficient as a creative artist. It is often said that since Beethoven lacked Mozart's interest in people, the music of *Fidelio* cannot delineate persons with the insight, the subtlety, or the pointillistic genius of Mozart. I think this is

[8] Quoted in W. J. Turner, *Beethoven: The Search for Reality* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1927), p. 243.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

true, but very misleading. For Beethoven uses a different brushstroke, one that is broader and more monumental than anything Mozart could imagine, and he does so because he has a vision of humanity that Mozart never approximates. Though Mozart wrote hymns to mankind in the pious chords of his masonic faith, he has little conception of the human race as a whole. For him it is merely an empirical summation of those many individuals he understood and possibly loved. For Beethoven it is a totality, a single entity with a single nature that no class of individuals could duplicate. It therefore requires a different devotion from the small-scale affection that one or another person might engender. In Mozart one scarcely feels the influence of Kant. In Beethoven his moral imperatives appear all the time. And perhaps it is *only* a misanthrope—or at least, a solitary sufferer—who can fully appreciate Kant when he says that "in all men we must honor the dignity of the whole race," and then defines dignity in relation to reason alone. A Mozart would instinctively turn away from a philosopher who subordinates the variable sentiments of real people to an abstract and uniform dignity of the race. Beethoven finds the idea uplifting and inspiring. It enabled him to see human beings as the exemplar of something further. Possibly it convinced him that great art always treats people as more than merely particular persons.

Beethoven also differs from Mozart in his attitude towards political action. Among the five major Mozart operas there are heroic figures in only *The Abduction* and *The Magic Flute*. And in these the hero is a prince who saves a princess, as he would in any folk tale. But neither Belmonte nor Tamino has any political awareness. The heroism in Mozart operas is always of the personal or romantic sort that medieval legends exploit. Even *Figaro,* for all its revolutionary intrigue, subordinates politics to the individual search for pleasure. In *Fidelio,* however, the female hero acts in a way that liberates a man who is not only her husband but also a heroic liberator himself. Her motivation is political as well as personal, and through her ability to use personal devices in a political cause (while also using political devices in a personal cause) she explores a region of female consciousness that Mozart knew nothing about. Plato, who with Kant was one of the few philosophers Beethoven read, believed that an ideal Republic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would employ music to mold the passions of ordinary citizens in ways that could be politically beneficial. Napoleon thought the same. In one of his first letters as a consul, he wrote: "Among all the fine arts, music is the one which exercises the greatest influences upon the passions and is the one which the legislator should most encourage." The tone of such a remark is foreign to Mozart. It fits Beethoven's music perfectly—*Fidelio* as well as the Eroica Symphony, *Egmont* as well as the Ninth.

Fidelio is subtitled "the triumph of married love," but really it is dedicated to *married love as a basis for action*. The trials of Konstanze-Belmonte or Pamina-Tamino are designed to prove that the lovers were made for each other. Leonore and Florestan are not being subjected to tests of that sort. They have already passed through the premarital fires that confront Mozart's characters. Instead of proving their oneness, they use it to work as a team; and what they work for becomes as important to the mythology of the opera as the fact that they love each other. Mozart's heroes and heroines have nothing in the world to do. Once they attain one another in a suitable marriage, they need only enjoy the pleasures of a sensuous life. Beethoven's protagonists devote themselves to the cause of human freedom: freedom for all people, in all places and at all times.

Even so, this political concern was still an idealization for Beethoven. Consider his angry statement when he took the name of Napoleon off the title page of the Eroica. Having just learned that Napoleon now calls himself Emperor, Beethoven concludes that he cannot be the great liberator the world awaited: "Then he, too, is nothing but an ordinary man! Now he also will tread all human rights underfoot, will gratify only his own ambition, will raise himself up above all others, and become a tyrant."[9] As a prediction, these words turned out to be all too true—but possibly because Napoleon was not *enough* of an ordinary man. Like Beethoven himself, he was driven by an image of heroic achievement that stirs the soul but rarely conduces to the creation of a good society. The great leader may be inspired by passionate ambitions, but he acts in concrete ways that satisfy the moment by moment necessities of men and women. This side of political action Beethoven did not understand. He is a revolutionary only

[9] *Beethoven: Letters, Journals and Conversations*, p. 30.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in feeling the upsurge of emotion afforded by the sheer *possibility* of amelioration in the human condition. The breaking of eggs in the hope of making omelettes he could well appreciate; but the tedious work of cookery, the part of political action that consists in the making of the omelette, had no place in his imagination.

For this reason, men of action will always find Beethoven's music ultimately unsatisfying. He intrigues them by seeming to understand their moral cravings. But then, at the moment of political truth, his soul takes flight. Maxim Gorky quotes Lenin as saying of the *Appassionata:* "I would like to listen to it every day. It is marvelous, superhuman music. I always think with pride—perhaps it is naïve of me—what marvelous things human beings can do!" To this Lenin adds, not mentioning Beethoven's music but obviously thinking of it: "But I can't listen to music too often. It affects your nerves, makes you want to say stupid, nice things, and stroke the heads of people who could create such beauty while living in this vile hell. And now you mustn't stroke anyone's head—you might get your hand bitten off. You have to hit them on the head, without any mercy, although our ideal is not to use force against anyone. H'm, h'm, our duty is infernally hard."[10]

In the nineteenth-century culture to which Lenin was reared, it was precisely Beethoven's ability to affect one's nerves that was most highly prized. The forcefulness, and even violence, of his music provided an aesthetic substitute for hitting people on the head. So many years before Lenin, Beethoven too had said: "Our age requires strong-minded men who will flog these petty, treacherous, miserable scoundrels of human beings." Yet nothing but the drama of action enters into his work, nothing but the passion of politics. And perhaps that is why Tolstoy felt so great a revulsion towards Beethoven's music. In *The Kreutzer Sonata* his protagonist says: "Under the influence of such music it seems to me that I feel what I do not really feel, that I understand what I do not understand, that I can do what I cannot do." Tolstoy was revolted by the mere phenomenon of passion, with all its subterranean links to sexuality; but also he knew that even the

[10] Maxim Gorky, *Days with Lenin* (New York: International Publishers, 1932), p. 52.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

noblest of political passions have no reliable consequences in moral action.

Here again, I am not suggesting that Beethoven failed in any way. I only point out that his music is both political by nature and also an idealization of emotions which do not necessarily lead to changes in human behavior or social institutions. In the Eroica Symphony, in the Fifth, in *Fidelio*—and in most of the music of Beethoven's early maturity—one senses a powerful will demanding a better world for human beings as a whole; one senses an angry rejection of artificial or tyrannical restraints upon man's freedom; one senses a passionate voice unsatisfied with petty compromises. But does one sense an actuality that would bring happiness or peace to this perturbed spirit? Occasionally, but not very often. In *Fidelio* there is a happy ending; but one can hardly envisage the stable married life of Florestan and Leonore. Liberty and the joy of marital bliss are each presented as eternal essences that must not be questioned too closely. They are the goals of a longing that may never be satisfied, and may never want to be.

As if with Beethoven in mind, Schopenhauer said that music differs from other arts inasmuch as "it is not an image of phenomena, or more correctly, of the adequate objectivity of the will, but an immediate image of the will itself, and represents accordingly the metaphysics of all that is physical in the world, the thing *per se,* which lies beyond all appearance."[11] Written in 1818, this remark can have no reference to the later Beethoven. But it suits the Beethoven of *Fidelio* very well. In that work, and in others of the same period, Beethoven expresses the being of a passionate will that seems to be demanding something no experience could possibly afford. As the conversations with Bettina Brentano indicate, Beethoven thought that his music revealed the nature of ultimate reality.[12] His belief was an act of faith, and therefore beyond any profitable criticism. What matters most is the fact that so much of his work expresses unrelenting will,

[11] *The World as Will and Representation,* Vol. I, #52. *Cf.* also the reference to Beethoven in Vol. II, Chapter XXXIX.

[12] For the context as well as the content of Beethoven's remarks, *cf.* Romain Rolland, *Goethe and Beethoven* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931). *Cf.* also J. W. N. Sullivan, *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

insatiable passion. If his music reveals an ultimate reality, it must be related to that condition, and to the likelihood that only in a work of art can such passion be enjoyed or fully consummated.

That Beethoven should have written the greatest opera about conjugal love while never finding it for himself is thus not a paradox after all. For he writes about the striving and not the achievement, about a will that can never terminate in experience, about a passion that cannot be consummated except in the artistic expression of passion. And possibly Beethoven could not have written about conjugal love at all if he himself had undergone the confusing complexities of the real thing.

In being a dramatization of passion, of heroism, and of that aggressive willfulness without which there could be neither passion nor heroism, *Fidelio* takes the form of a religious mystery. It is a passion play for that new religion of man which the French Revolution sought to establish and nineteenth-century romanticism nearly did. Like all mysteries, it presupposes a dualistic approach to human experience. There is the world above ground in which the opera begins; and there is the dungeon, below ground, the hidden being in which the holy performance completes itself. In earlier versions of *Fidelio,* Beethoven concluded his opera with the moment of victory in the dungeon. This accentuates the dualism. In its final form, however, the work ends above ground. This does not destroy the basic dualism; it merely unites the elements of reality at that level on which ordinary life exists. Speaking of a "metaphysical design" behind the musical plan, Marion Scott says:

> Each act opens simply, with few characters, then gradually gathers its forces until it expands into a broad concerted finale. But while Act I begins in bright daylight and banter with the simplicity of little everyday affairs and moves from them steadily downward into the shadows of tragedy and the sighing of all that are desolate and oppressed in the prisoners' choruses, Act II begins below the threshold of hope, and from the lowest prison of the human soul in loneliness, as typified in Florestan, passes gradually upward to faith fulfilled in a burst of light more glorious than any sunrise.[13]

[13] Marion M. Scott, *Beethoven* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1937), pp. 198-99.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In ordinary life we are not aware of the two levels, and so Beethoven magnifies, enlarges each beyond its normal size. Though the prison is a grave, as the prisoners tell us, Beethoven presents it with the Baroque grandeur of a Piranesi print. In one of his studies of prison architecture, Piranesi sketches a gigantic man outstretched in suffering—reminiscent of Michelangelo's Adam but writhing like an antecedent of Florestan. In another, he casts two solitary figures, guards conversing with one another. They are dwarfed by the dimensions of their institution; but also its lines and mammoth spaces bestow a terrible importance upon their conversation. In Beethoven, too, the little problems of the jailer's family seem more momentous than if the scene were set in the local square. The awkwardness of Jaquino, a latter-day Masetto, the fickleness of Marzelline, the paternal solicitude of Rocco—all this is bourgeois comedy. And yet, it immediately issues into the bizarre contrivance of a Leonore so well disguised that Marzelline can fall in love with her. Village love is not that blind; and even if it were, it could hardly deceive Rocco as well. We easily suspend disbelief, however, because we are intimidated by the awesomeness of Beethoven's prison. We also know that traditionally heroism is a masculine trait. If Leonore is to be an heroic female in the myth, she may very well appear under the guise of a wandering bachelor. Jaquino stutters his proposal of marriage to music that is almost mocking in its hesitation: "Ich—ich habe—ich habe. . . ." Though she does not know who or what Fidelio is, Marzelline prefers him as any girl would naturally choose a knight rather than a squire. Without realizing it, she is in love with the heroic mission that has led him to this grim, unlikely spot.

Thus even at the level of the bourgeois and the commonplace, we are already in the realm of myth. All the details of the opera are controlled by the necessity of having the female hero descend into the lower reality. She cannot do this except as Rocco's companion, and she cannot become his companion except as his prospective son-in-law. The plot arranges this, intriguing us with the difficulties of sexual miscegenation. As a way of organizing the confusion, the music issues into a quartet that expresses the varying attitudes of Leonore, Marzelline, Rocco, and Jaquino while also presenting them in a canon that suggests an underlying unity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In fact, the oneness of the canonic form dominates the *Mir ist so wunderbar* quartet to such an extent that all divergency in sentiment seems wholly incidental. Although the four characters have conflicting points of view, Beethoven accords them very little musical differentiation. Instead they are merged into an exalted and quasi-religious *sostenuto* that transcends their individual interests.[14] Unlike Verdi in the *Rigoletto* quartet, Beethoven cares less about dramatic characterization than about the single mythic purpose for the sake of which these characters have been created.

Exactly *what* that is, the quartet does not tell us. We see the goal that unites these voices only after Rocco sings (in solid and easily negotiable music) his paean to money as the basis of a sound marriage. As against this idea, Leonore replies that only "the union of two kindred hearts" can assure the existence of marital bliss. Since Florestan languishes in the dungeon, she must descend to prove that Rocco's view is wrong even for the superficial world. Her heroic oneness with Florestan unifies both levels of reality. It is the end, the telos, of every moment in both the drama and the music.

But though she is heroic, Leonore is not a militant female. Like the heroines in Mozart, she assumes the aggressive role only reluctantly. She may guide the male to freedom, and she may assert herself against a tyrannical Pizarro, but she does not pretend to the kind of dominance that men have regularly taken for themselves in the western world.

This aspect of Leonore's character Beethoven articulates very carefully in the great *Abscheulicher* aria. It has the three-part structure that was traditional for a classical soprano declamation, and Beethoven uses each of its elements to express ideas about female emotionality that are basic to the entire opera. As in the dramatic scene *Ah, perfido!* which Beethoven had written in his youth, the aria begins with an outburst of feminine indignation, which then turns into feelings of tenderness, and finally resolves itself as a kind of aggressiveness justified by an "innern Triebe"—a spiritual impulse. In both arias, the elements contribute to a dialectic that suggests a thesis-antithesis-synthesis about the na-

[14] On this, *cf.* Herbert F. Peyser, "*Fidelio*," in *Introduction to Opera* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1956), p. 89. *Cf.* also Maurice Kufferath, *Fidelio de L. Van Beethoven* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1913).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ture of woman. But where the heroine of *Ah, perfido!* modulates within the varieties of personal passion, like Donna Anna demanding vengeance, Leonore expresses a humanitarian purpose that eventuates in moral fervor suitable to the wife of a hero. Her initial anger turns into a sense of hope; and her final determination asserts itself in the name of a love that synthesizes everything else, a love that will not flinch or falter, an imperious instinct for conjugality, both fierce and tender at the same time. Leonore may dress like a male, and she may have to brandish a pistol like a man, but her hand quivers.[15] Far from wanting to dominate, she wishes to free her husband for the moral action that defines his being. The brasses, particularly the French horns, support her in this resolve, as if they were the voice of that virile but incapacitated man who needs his wife to help him in his labors.

As in the passage I previously quoted, one psychoanalytic interpretation sees in Leonore the effeminate and mothering side of Beethoven himself. But if we are to identify Beethoven with one or another of his characters, surely it is more plausible to identify him with Florestan. His first word—*Gott!*—resounds through the dungeon as a lengthy and supplicating cry to the principle of creativity that Beethoven worshipped throughout his life. It is the ritual utterance *aus der Tiefe,* from the depths, of the crushed but striving male. The darkness to which Florestan has been condemned may also symbolize the deafness that progressively isolated Beethoven from human affection.[16] If Florestan and Beethoven himself surmount their destiny, it is because neither ceases to struggle. This of course was to be the moral of Goethe's *Faust;* and it suitably applies to male pretensions throughout western culture. Despite the depression and misery with which Florestan's initial aria begins, it portrays him as a man who does not give up. Like the *Abscheulicher* aria, this one is also divided into three sections. But instead of a dialectical movement, its elements are organized into a linear progression—three steps upward, one after the other. First, there is a lament about imprisonment, ending with an acceptance of God's will. This leads into

[15] Berlioz writes: "I can still see Madame Devrient, stretching out her trembling arm in the direction of Pizarro." (*Op. cit.,* p. 153)

[16] On this, *cf.* Alan Tyson, "Beethoven's Heroic Phase," *Musical Times,* February 1969, pp. 139-41.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a more buoyant realization that Florestan has only done his duty. That turns into a final exaltation as he senses the approach of the redeeming angel—*ein Engel, Leonoren*—who will restore his freedom.

When Pizarro is about to kill him, Florestan takes another step upwards. As the orchestra surges heroically, he rises to a level of defiance in verbally attacking the aggressor who claims a right to vengeance. Thereafter, Leonore takes over. She guides the hero safely through the valley of the shadow of death. She has descended like Orpheus to save her beloved spouse. But unlike Orpheus, she does not look back, and so Florestan lives again.

The mythic rebirth of Florestan, his return to life through his courage and the efforts of an angelic woman, depends on more than the married couple alone. It requires the godlike power of men like Don Fernando, the deus ex machina who actually effects the liberation. In him Beethoven had the opportunity of creating a new Sarastro. But he makes no such attempt. Don Fernando is less impressive, less awe-inspiring. Perhaps Beethoven had difficulty identifying with a political authority; perhaps he wished to subordinate all other ideals to the freedom-loving heroism of Leonore and Florestan. Nevertheless, he recognizes the utility of a Don Fernando, as well as the importance of humble intermediaries like Rocco. As if he were Charon ferrying between life and death, Rocco descends with Leonore and returns with Florestan. But though he is a Charon-figure, Rocco also transcends his mythic function. For the association with noble creatures like Fidelio and Florestan seems to elevate his morality. When Pizarro offers him money—whose goodness Rocco has just been extolling —he refuses it rather than commit a murder. Under the humanizing influence of Leonore, he allows that momentary freedom to the prisoners and later comforts Florestan for the first time after all the months of systematic neglect. By the end of the opera, it is Rocco who speaks for the two heroes. At least, it is he who steps forward to inform Don Fernando of their identity and to condemn Pizarro.

Rocco mediates not only between the sunshine and the dungeon, between life and death, between freedom and enslavement, between the hardness of gold and the softness of his awakening sympathy, between the tyranny of a Pizarro whom he initially

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

serves and the nobility of a Don Fernando to whom he eventually turns, but also—and most significantly—between suffering humanity and the constraints that society has imposed upon it. The chorus of prisoners in Act I resembles, at least reminds us of, the chorus of priests in *The Magic Flute*. But though the music is equally reverential in both cases, it belongs to different religious attitudes. The prisoners attain a kind of holiness *simply* because they have suffered. Their music is sacred not only in celebrating the mystic qualities of the sun, as in Mozart, but also in arising from the souls of men who have been victimized by actuality. It does not matter that they may be criminals, or even murderers as hateful as Pizarro himself. They suffer, for whatever reason, and that makes them real and human to Beethoven in a way that never appears in Mozart's music. For Beethoven life is not a journey, as *The Magic Flute* maintained: it is a universal agony that only the greatest sympathy and the greatest dedication can overcome. No one, however vile, is to be excluded from the love that all men deserve. Beethoven even wanted Pizarro spared the punishment that the angry crowd demands in the final version of *Fidelio*. Originally, Leonore and Florestan interceded on Pizarro's behalf, convincing Don Fernando that Pizarro did not have the moral fortitude to undergo the suffering he himself had meted out, and therefore should be pardoned.

To have ended the opera that way, the tyrant restored to human dignity along with Florestan, might have confused the moralistic audience but it would have served Beethoven's inspiration perfectly. In being a human mystery, *Fidelio* has little to tell us about law or public policy or even penal reform. Retribution is too petty, and justice too much like bookkeeping, for its passionate aspirations. And anyhow, Pizarro is a man like any other. Though he is evil and must be defeated, it is his sheer humanity as one who errs that Beethoven cares about more than anything else. The words Pizarro utters in his first act aria are fearful and diabolical—so much so that he sounds almost ridiculous to a twentieth century no longer living within the conventions of musical melodrama. But the orchestra that supports and interweaves the tyrant's voice is neither diabolical nor ridiculous. It is agitated and angry, but in a manner that could possibly have expressed the struggles of a moral hero. In short, it is the usual

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

music for Beethovian passion. In all his perversity of motive, Pizarro too is furiously seeking some kind of freedom. We can infer that his kind is evil, indeed we must do so for the plot to make sense, but the orchestral texture presents his striving as just a bit of that transempirical will which underlies the dynamism of life in general. Only in Act II, when Pizarro physically confronts Florestan, does the orchestra recognize the fact that he is really evil. For now there is the dramatic possibility of his actually murdering the hero. Continuing the black and gloomy mood of the dungeon, the music becomes twisted, ugly, frightening. We now see the will in its most hideous aspect, as Faust does when he calls forth the earth-spirit. How can this be loved, even by an angel and her humanitarian husband?

Beethoven does not tell us. Pizarro is led away by soldiers, and we are expected to forget about him. Where Bouilly had an invisible chorus shouting "Vengeance! Vengeance!," Beethoven introduces the jubilant "Heil sei dem Tag." Our attention is needed for the phenomenon of reconciliation among the victors: the lovers with each other, the prisoners with society. Since the will strives towards an elusive end beyond itself, it can never be fully satisfied. Still, it can sing the praises of those who keep on struggling. Perhaps that is why Beethoven revised the finale as he did. Instead of ending the opera soon after the joyful duet of the reunited couple in the dungeon, he goes on to the expansive music of thanksgiving to God and adulation of Leonore. The duet *O namen-namenlose Freude!* thus becomes a moment of private joy to balance the public celebration that follows in the next scene. And certainly, something of the sort was needed. Otherwise, we could not have reached a contrasting oneness that embraces all humanity instead of two isolated individuals.

In his adoration of Mozart, Goethe tried to write a sequel to *The Magic Flute*. He never finished his libretto, though he used the material for the scenes in heaven of *Faust, Part II*. Where Goethe failed, Beethoven succeeded. The ending of *Fidelio* completes the mythology of *The Magic Flute*. There is no heaven here, but there wasn't one for Mozart either. With Leonore's voice marching on before, rising above the rest as if to indicate an order of importance, the company thanks the God of righteousness who "tries us but does not forsake us." These are men and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

women on earth, yearning for a divinity that has touched them in their unexpected joy but still eludes their comprehension. The joyfulness of this music is reminiscent of the glorious finale to the second act of *The Abduction*. The lovers having found each other and Belmonte having assured himself that Konstanze remained faithful in the harem, the orchestra and vocal quartet sing the praises of Love Triumphant. But Beethoven's jubilation is even grander. For he brings the entire commonwealth into his celebration. The real communion occurs among the people themselves. The massive choruses in the finale are not the heavenly choirs. They are the vehicles of mere humanity. When Leonore sings that it was through the power of love that she was able to free Florestan, she means the human love of human beings. With the requisite monumentality, the choruses and full orchestra passionately give their hearts to Leonore herself, praising her and reiterating the magnificence of her achievement. Over and over again, first the voices and then the orchestra call her "Retterin, Retterin"—the leader, the female knight, the saviour of her husband and of all mankind.

In the culminating clangor of the finale, the choruses sing with freedom and an open heart. For that is the meaning of human victory. Participating in the ritual, they have achieved the liberation that music itself provides. Don Fernando's amnesty brings more than just an escape from imprisonment. As members of the great chorus, the prisoners are liberated by virtue of their ability to glorify in sound the freedom and the holiness of human love. To this end, Beethoven introduced into the text a modified version of those words by Schiller that he was later to use again in the Ninth Symphony: "Wer ein holdes Weib errungen/ Stimm' in unsern Jubel ein!" Let him who has won a fair wife join in our rejoicing! Leonore is that wife, but the music in both works merges her with something that goes beyond conjugality and is more than merely feminine. Through the harmony of an idealized marriage, the struggling will completes itself. And in doing so, it not only reconciles male and female but also those who are alienated from themselves and from their fellow men. It is a joyfulness that only those who have suffered can fully appreciate. It is the infinite goal of passion.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LARS GUSTAFSSON

San Francisco Sailing Further Underground

When the light falls over the hills
they brighten like fire, for a last moment

the whole city drinks the light

The first white men who saw Alcatraz
found the island swarming with penguins

solemn comical birds that died easily.

The Chinese were called in by Morgan, ten dollars,
not as a wage but once for all

and they died like flies in their railworks
no Chinese women were allowed

but ten or eleven came in any case
all Chinatown from eleven Chinese wombs

and the sick young girls from Canton
were locked in the cellars to die

Kaiser Morton, Lord of the USA
protector of Mexico, donor of the Xmas tree in Union Square

there's verdigris along his epaulettes

he died easily one winter night

If you are quiet you can hear the Creoles dance

Schooners, galliasses, four-masters, barques
entire city quarters consist of sunken ships

which were filled with sand and anchored
in a sisterly manner close against each other

The whole Embarcadero rests on an underground fleet.

Pan American Building, Bank of America

the skyscrapers are standing on decks deep down

and under the earth that fleet is sailing on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Free Fall

year after year it goes on
sometimes it seems to slow up

but it never stops

here are big friendly trees
they're not waiting for me

in the yellowed grass of late summer
the flock of crows rises

violently,

as if they didn't want to be overheard

someone simply strokes my hair
and I am perfectly happy
for three minutes

then I go on falling

headlong

year after year it goes on

there is no hand to catch me

and that's all

Darkness

Round my other side
my averted side
my uninhabited side

Darkness in darkness
and in the inmost dark
something to wrestle with

strong enough to whirl me away like a leaf

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fragment

(A . . . confined, in the command module
on the first expedition to Jupiter

after thirty four weeks goes into orbit
round the biggest, most ancient planet.

Then for four seconds
he weighs as much

as the biggest bronze bell in Kiev
and doesn't know it.)

. . . . . .

(A vanishes

like a shining point into the terminator's giant shadow.)

A Poem on Revisionism

An uncertain fly
trapped in a night-express

still tries flying
and finds it succeeds remarkably

Having come from the southern to the northern end of the coach
a much wiser fly already

the train going faster and faster into the night

Translated by Robin Fulton

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ROBERT NYE

Expurgations

First Chapter

"Disorder's daughters coupled in Eden
In a moral bed with the icon Adam,"
The Lord Christ says.
You laugh in the garden,
And comb your hair as green fountains harden.
Will you forgive death when he begs your pardon?
(1955-72)

Saint Joan

A thing in the form of a woman
By name of the Pucelle
Was burned by the soldiers at Rouen
After a proper trial.
She was a relapsed heretic,
And excommunicate catholic,
Apostate, idolatress,
Divineress and sorceress;
A devil from Lorraine
Whence devils come
In the dress of women,
As everyone knows.
(1956-72)

Revenant

If through that mirror's crack in not quite dusk
You see, or recall, the only ghost you know
Beyond your own ghost on the frost-worked pane—
Under a map of the Land of Cockaygne
A child asleep on his arms at a high desk,
Dreaming of puppets, poems, and sherbet powder—
Why not elect to love him, for he was
A boy who never learned to tell the time
And you're late coming home.
(1961-72)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Compline

Born into a world already dead
The funeral bores us with its brilliant doom;
Yet being jealous not to let our shadows
Fall in the grave, we kneel as is seemly
And do not grin overmuch behind clasped hands,
For some of us pray the resurrection, when it comes,
Will not be irresistible, nor define all the neighbours.
(1961-72)

The Grasshopper

Patience wears out stones: and poets too
Are worn out by a patience
For poetry, and for the unquiet poem.
But is the grasshopper impatient when
She drowns in autumn dew, a meagre fury?
(1962-72)

Shadow on a Hill

From where I stand on this bare hill
My shadow falls down land not mine
Like a long stranger, whose story
It has become to wait, unasked,
For an end of moon.
Broken shadow,
More miscellaneous to me now
Than when you went with roundhead swing
From I to I through a kingdom of selves
On nights before the moon was at the full.
You have grown cold in company you keep.
You have left nowhere for a barrener home.
(1964-72)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MICHAEL SCHMIDT

In the Air

It's a hunter's moon, red
as dead coral. Tonight we counted—
we lost count—of the hours.
The reeds have closed around the pool.
The pool has lost all record of our catch:

three trout we have brought home
in shallow water, wondering
at the thirst they felt as air
began to stiffen them with little gulps
in the pail that sloshed to our pace.

By the trailing hooks we lift them out,
silver as pale tubers, silver-green,
and slimed with tendril weeds.
As the gritty water lets them go
they feel the night along their swallow bodies,

their mouths become stiff ovals in the air.
You flap them flat on the ground.
Their painless eyes gaze on the scene of death:
this, then, is the air, and these its creatures;
here there is no grace in how things move,

and the dead do not float up
gently to the surface and lie still.
—You clean them with a knife.
You chafe the tiny coins into the pail.
You gut and lay them out beside their bones.

The eyes don't notice what they look upon.
We wear the silver, and the moon has found
a thousand burning mirrors on our wrists.
The scales stick. Our hands are fish in water
where they touch. We draw them up like roots.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ANNE S. PERLMAN

Summer Adjustments

1

Go softly now in the presence of circles,
along the low marsh roadway
between blackbirds and gulls:
in the sticky wind of the valley
wings are brushing.

2

Now we are passengers
bunched in a foreign train
compartment (no matter the country).
Our strangeness breaks over us,
crowded against
a man and a woman
in love. They are together
inside the circle of their shoulders.
It's the talk (no matter the language)
so close, so freighted
the circuit is closed.
Outside their brilliant territory
we dwindle.

3

Motionless in the August heat
we notice the shadow on the sundial,
how it curves through the weather.
Our heads turn to the sun's glare,
taste the heat wasting in our mouths.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHARLES W. MILLARD

The Reclining Figure and the Development of Modern Sculpture

AMONG THE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED by sculpture in its development from Canova to Caro two have stood out with particular clarity. The first of these was how to overcome the static tyranny of the standing human figure, considered, consciously or unconsciously, the appropriate subject for three-dimensional sculpture since its inception. Put more succinctly, the problem was how to make sculpture without making statues. The second problem, intimately related to the first, was how to overcome the presence of the pedestal. Like frames on pictures, which mediate between the work of art and its surroundings and begin the illusionistic process completed by traditional perspective construction, pedestals accommodate statues to their environments, raising them above the beholder's immediate world into the realm of artistic illusion. The difficulties involved in removing statues from their pedestals, however, are precisely the reverse of those involved in removing pictures from their frames. In the latter situation, the work becomes further separated from the beholder, a distanced two-dimensional object sharing his world but less easily related to him. In the former, psychological ambiguity rather than distanced clarity results, for the beholder's world is invaded by objects sharing both his form and his three-dimensionality, yet clearly not of the same nature as he. The historical solution to both sculptural problems, which forms the nineteenth-century bridge that connects traditional statues with abstract sculpture, permitting the purging of sculpture's human associations, is to be found in the reclining figure. Such figures have the advantage of already occupying a vital half-world, most obvious when they are used in funerary monuments, and they are less of a psychological challenge and less difficult to accept directly into the "real" world than standing forms. For much the same reason, they were less acceptable as an artistic mode to nineteenth-century academic theoreticians and practitioners. "What is the symbolism of the reclining statue?" asked Henry Jouin in 1876, "Defeat, sleep, or death remain graven in the horizontal lines of a reclining figure."

Despite academic condescension, however, at least one major neoclassical work exploits the possibilities of the reclining figure. Canova's *Pauline Borghese* manages to preserve the human alertness of the statue while suggesting a few of the sculptural possibilities of the sinuous reclining nude, and the bed necessary to support the figure successfully sidesteps the pedestal problem altogether. All in all, the *Pauline Borghese* reinforces one's suspicion that Canova was an artist

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DUSEIGNEUR *Roland Furieux* (*Musée du Louvre; photo, Bulloz*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whose ideas were far more daring than his finished marbles normally indicate. The fact that even in this novel work he cloaked his daring in an acceptable neo-classical envelope may help explain why it was without sculptural issue. Equally without issue, because it remained largely unknown, was the sculpture of an artist of quite different persuasion—Géricault. Among the several three-dimensional works from his hand are a few small groups which touch on most of the major sculptural issues of the nineteenth century. The *Nymph and Satyr* now in Buffalo is such a piece. Small in size—it is a few inches in length—the group has an integral base, and for both reasons the pedestal problem never arises. The elaborate way in which its figures are intertwined creates a spatial configuration prophetic in its sophistication. At one stroke Géricault seems to have grasped the fact that freeing sculpture from its pedestal and re-orienting its implied direction would lead it toward objects in which void had as animate a function as solid. In this, as well as in the scale of his sculpture and the erotic content which would have made it unpalatable to the nineteenth century had it been known, he followed Clodion, while he looked to Michelangelo in matters of style.

It was not until 1831, roughly a decade after Géricault and Delacroix had engaged the Classic-Romantic battle in painting, that a major attack was made in the Salon on traditional ideas of sculpture. That attack took the form of a reclining figure—Jean DuSeigneur's *Roland Furieux*. Its heavy musculature clearly derived from Michelangelo, the figure is executed in bronze, a material which, partly because it emphasizes bulk form at the expense of detail and partly because it is the direct translation of the sculptor's wax model, was preferred by Romantic sculptors. The contorted pose of the *Roland* announces DuSeigneur's anti-static, anti-classical position and the fact that the movement implied by that pose is restrained by Roland's bonds creates an unstable tension suggesting how surrounding space could come to be more actively involved in free-standing sculpture. It also, unhappily, calls attention to the difficulties of representing the reclining human form in convincing action, and gives some substance to the criticisms levelled against the piece as being awkward and unconvincing. Despite the apparent threat of the figure to slide off its base, however, the vigor of DuSeigneur's conception and execution assures the *Roland* a unique position in the development of modern sculpture, and in details such as the heroic hands one can easily imagine oneself in the presence of a Rodin of half a century later.

The problem of finding believable justifications for reclining human action was almost insuperable, particularly as many poses that might have been used were erotic and consequently unacceptable to the nineteenth century. It was, therefore, necessary to find other subject matter in which new sculptural ideas could appropriately be embodied, and at exactly the moment the *Roland Furieux* appeared Barye was exploring just such motifs. Exhibiting at the Salon first in 1827, it was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GÉRICAULT *Nymph and Satyr* (*Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York; George B. and Jenny R. Mathews Fund*)

BARYE *Jaguar Devouring a Hare* (*Musée du Louvre; photo, Bulloz*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not until 1831 and 1833 that Barye showed the great animal groups with which his name was to be identified thereafter. Heroic in scale and often in size, these bronze groups eliminated the difficulty of combining sculpturally convincing configurations with naturalistically convincing action by representing living creatures whose bodies were naturally parallel to the ground rather than at right angles to it. Possibilities for spatial variation were infinitely increased by the ease with which two or more figures could be combined, and by anatomical features such as tails and antlers. As to the actions performed, the mortal violence in which animals might be represented at once satisfied an important aspect of the Romantic sensibility and rendered that sensibility more palatable to a public which would have found violence objectionable as a human attribute. *Jaguar Devouring a Hare* of 1850 suggests how successful this formula could be. The powerful head and haunches of the jaguar continue in the Michelangelesque tradition so important to Géricault and DuSeigneur, while the sinuous curve of its tail only vaguely suggests the spatial elaboration possible in such groups. Barye's *Stag Brought Down by Scotch Hounds* of almost twenty years earlier is already a masterful statement of such elaboration, while his *Roger and Angelica on the Hippogriff* exhibits the tendency of spatially-oriented sculpture, particularly that of animals in rapid motion, to want to detach itself completely from the ground. Partly for this reason, Barye was obliged to provide bits of landscape as supports for his figures and while this successfully modulated between the animals and the real ground, obviating the need for a more conventional pedestal, it also meant that the most fully realized groups were those in relatively restricted movement close to the ground, or those acting at an acute angle to the ground. The heroic bulk of Barye's subjects made it impossible for him to raise them up on slender supports, as Degas was able to do with his lean-legged racehorses, thereby suggesting levitation.

The importance of animal sculpture to the development of modern sculpture in general cannot be overstressed. Barye, the greatest sculptor of the century before Rodin, not only left an important body of work in this *genre,* but inspired a large group of younger men from Fremiet to Bugatti to devote themselves to it. Although little of this work rose to Barye's level, it was at least characterized by a freshness and lack of pretension generally missing in the work of other sculptors of the period. Being entirely free of human forms and associations, animal sculpture made it possible for artists to think through the formal problems of sculpture afresh. Since the sculpture of animals was a *genre* of no particular importance in the academic hierarchy it was one almost totally free of imposed preconceptions of form and content. Through it an imaginative artist such as Degas could develop new ideas which were then able to feed back toward more established subject matter in a reciprocally nourishing pattern of growth, and it is telling that when Matisse set out on his important

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sculptural explorations he began by copying Barye. In these respects animal sculpture is the exact parallel of Barbizon landscape painting, and forms much the same sort of bridge between the art of the early nineteenth century and that of the end of the century. This point was neatly made by Edmond About in 1885 when he noted that, "The animal sculptors are the landscapists of the statuary art." Not long before the Goncourts had observed more generally, "Nature takes the place of man. That is the evolution of modern art."

In the curious and disjointed development that is the course of nineteenth-century sculpture there occurs a mid-century lull in which appear three isolated and wholly unrelated works making use of the reclining figure. Two of these, Préault's *Ophelia* and Clesinger's *Woman Bitten by a Serpent* (1847), are in almost identical poses, but the similarity ends abruptly there. Préault, the most *fougueuse* of the Romantic sensibilities, has created a bronze low relief in which the linear patterns describing the hair and garments of the floating Ophelia blend with those of the surrounding water so that all seems caught up in one swirling substance. This powerful and surprising anticipation of art nouveau style is all the more unusual in that it is almost certainly meant to be installed at ground level and viewed from directly above. Thus, not only is all idea of a pedestal eliminated, but an entirely new viewpoint, one suggested but not insisted upon by small animal sculpture, is introduced—an achievement, it must be admitted, that is somewhat mitigated by the fact of the sculpture's being a relief. Clesinger's *Woman,* on the other hand, is executed in the academically-preferred marble, every detail of her anatomy and the flowered ground on which she lies meticulously indicated. Presumably writhing in agony, although the serpent that has bitten her is all but invisible, the voluptuous figure, surely the nakedest of nineteenth-century nudes, could well be the inspiration for Fénéon's outburst forty years later, "O these sculptors of pleasing things; dainty, pretty, and polished! O the war of Canova! And yet Canova had the Princess Pauline Borghese to pose before him; but from what living flesh do they copy these clockcase subjects, fit at most to excite the libidinousness of dirty old men?" No other work shows so well how thoroughly and rapidly conventional sculpture could absorb and debase ideas that in other hands became the first indications of a new art.

The third of the mid-century surprises is one of the most unjustly neglected major monuments of its time, Rude's *Napoleon Awakening to Immortality* (1845-1847). Rising from the rock of St. Helena, his broken chains and fallen eagle beneath him, the transfigured emperor emerges from the enveloping cape that is his shroud. Starting from sketches of a more prosaic conception involving an unshrouded body stretched out full length on its back that was clearly based on his contemporary tomb for Godefroy de Cavaignac, Rude developed a final scheme of startling and prophetic originality. Not only does the cape

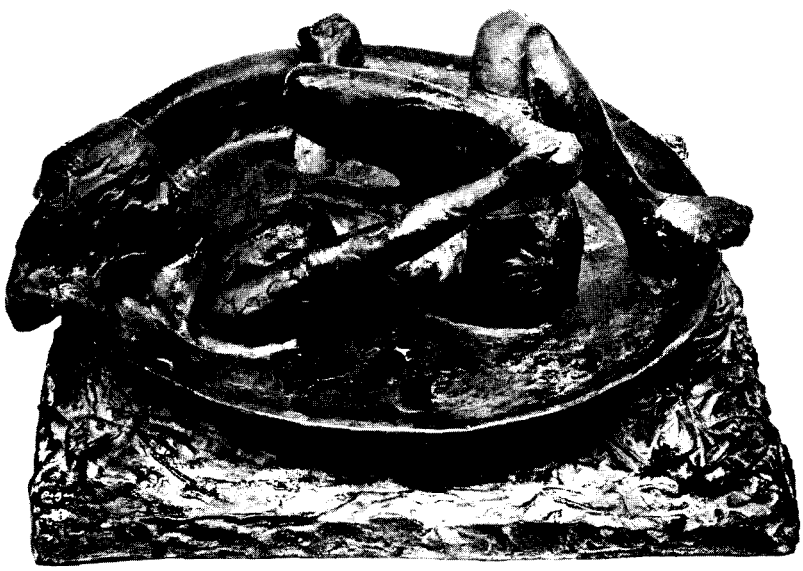
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that occupies fully half the composition keep Napoleon from seeming to be about to slide off his base in the manner of DuSeigneur's *Roland,* it entirely conceals the body, a stroke of daring not to be attempted again until Rodin's monumental *Balzac.* Like Rodin, too, Rude seems interested in the issues of inside and outside raised by the draping of the cape, and by concealing the body he circumvents altogether the issue of contemporary vs. classical clothing, a matter particularly relevant to Napoleon and his imperial image and one hotly debated by Classicists and Romantics. Of the two most successful naturalistic solutions to this problem one, the *Petite Danseuse* of Degas, is well known. The other, Dalou's bronze tomb of Victor Noir (1890), whose effigy lies precisely in the attitude in which Noir fell shot by Pierre Bonaparte and is represented dressed in the clothes he wore, must share with the Rude *Napoleon* the honor of being the most striking of nineteenth-century monumental reclining figures.

To return to less isolated developments, it is perhaps not accidental that Degas took up sculpture in the middle 1870's at just the moment Barye died. Although he created both animals and the human figure from the outset, horses occupied him particularly during the first decade of his modelling activity, and he brought them to an advanced sculptural state indeed. Always interested in movement and in rising configurations, Degas studied horses jumping and balking, finding in their motions the source for a series of small sculptures of the utmost spatial refinement. In the midst of this activity, and of his studies of ballet dancers rising from one toe to create patterns of tremendous spatial sophistication, Degas sculpted a unique work that accepted the floor in the most straightforward way as the literal ground along which it could be developed. This work, *The Tub* (1889), is intended to be seen from directly above as well as from every other possible angle and had, thus, to be created with the subtlest interrelationships of solid and void, demanding of the viewer extended and sequential visual exploration. While the figure inhabits the viewer's space, its small scale spares it the psychological ambiguity a life-sized figure would have had. In this single piece Degas brought to fruition most of the important ideas first enunciated by Romantic sculpture and proved, as Clodion had proved before him, that a viable high art could be made of small-scale sculpture. At least as importantly, he pointed the way to new and more abstract ideas by inverting the relationships of sculptural solids inherent in Romantic subject matter. Standing human and animal figures place their major bulk on top of, and hence as termination to, the thin supports of legs. In *The Tub* Degas has reversed this sequence by placing his model's body on the floor and raising her arms and legs in the air, a pose justified by her activity. By so doing he has made it possible to develop a spatial structure rising off the ground, opening rather than closing as it ascends. He controls this structure by returning it to itself at the point at which the figure's right hand grasps her left foot, but it need not be so con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RODIN *The Earth* (*Collection B. G. Cantor Art Foundation*)



DEGAS *The Tub* (*The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929. H. O. Havemeyer Collection*)

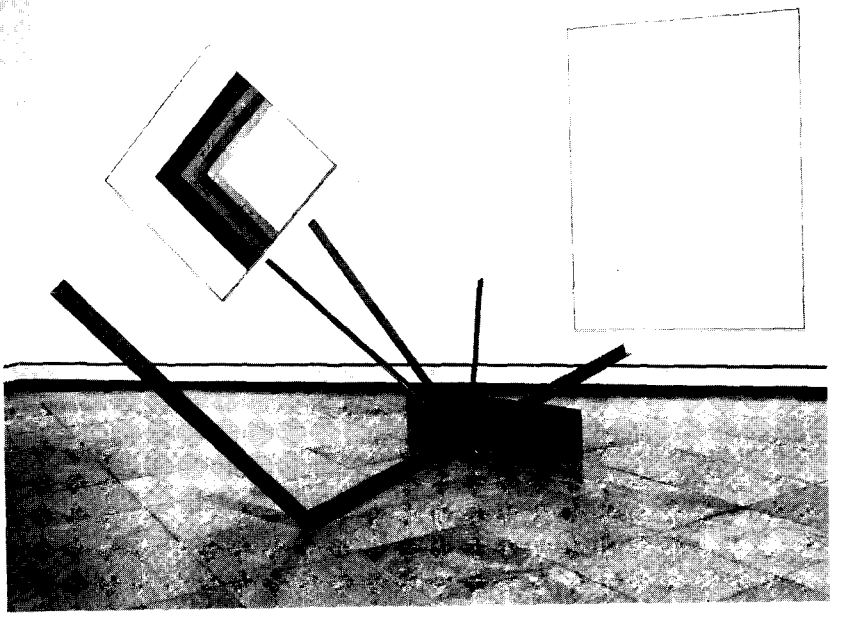
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trolled, and the possibilities suggested by *The Tub* are so advanced that they were not to be fully capitalized upon until after the middle of the twentieth century.

If Degas' explorations had no immediate impact, it was partly the result of his having kept his sculpture to himself. Partly, however, it was due to the sculptural ascendency of Rodin who, although he made use of Romantic subject matter and facture, was in many ways a conventional sensibility, thinking in terms of monuments on pedestals and, always, in terms of sculptural bulk rather than spatial development. Even the late small-scale dancing figures, which are almost certainly indebted to Degas, maintain their gravitational weightiness, and early sketches for the ground-level *Burghers of Calais* show that Rodin originally wanted it placed atop a high pedestal. His concern with the female figure led him not so much to a sculptural interest in its movement and activities as to more personal associations with its sexuality. These associations led, in turn, to studies of vases and vessels containing figures which raised problems of inside and outside similar to those hinted at in Rude's *Napoleon*. If, however, Rodin was less daring and intellectually less forceful than Degas, he did continue the interest in the reclining figure as it had been developed by Barye. Many of his figures, particularly the studies for the *Gates of Hell,* behave like animals, crawling on all fours or intertwined in groups, and one has only to consider the figure of *Earth* stretched along the ground, the play of light defining its forms, to realize how much Rodin owed to the lithe animality of the older master's subjects.

Since Rodin was far and away the greatest sculptor of his time, his ideas tended to linger well after his death, inhibiting for a time the development of the open sculpture that seemed inevitable once the pedestal had been banished and sculptural configurations running along the ground proved viable. Two of the major early twentieth century-sculptors, Matisse and Brancusi, worked well within Rodin's framework. Although Brancusi experimented with disembodied heads and, particularly, with architectural elements such as gates, he never ceased to be attracted to standing motifs and was particularly preoccupied with pedestals. It is probably Henry Moore, a sculptor who started within the Rodin-Brancusi tradition by making compact and streamlined marble shapes (which, indeed, he continues to make today), who represents the principal contemporary link between the possibilities first suggested for the reclining figure almost a century and a half ago and the realization of those possibilities in contemporary abstract sculpture. Moore's conventional interest in the human figure and in landscape led him to the most obvious possible combination of those themes in the reclining figures, configured and broken like mountain ranges, on which he has concentrated for so much of his career. As Moore has said, "There are three fundamental poses of the human figure. One is standing, the other is seated, and the third is lying down . . . of all three poses, the reclining figure gives the most

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



CARO *Wide* (*private collection*)

SMITH *Cubi XXIII* (*Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Contemporary Art Council Fund*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

freedom, compositionally and spatially." It is not, however, in Moore's own work that the tradition of the reclining figure finds its logical conclusion, but in that of Anthony Caro, who at one time served an apprenticeship with him. Although he has largely repudiated Moore's influence, it seems not too much to suggest that Caro's constant exposure to Moore's reclining figures habituated him to the horizontal format which is to be found throughout his own work. Be that as it may, part of the realization of Caro's genius has involved completely sweeping away all intermediaries between the sculpture and its real environment by simply assuming the floor on which it stands as its ground. Furthermore, Caro has frequently developed his pieces upward from the floor in the manner suggested by Degas, and has experimented with architectural and mechanical means of accomplishing the same thing. All of which is to say that it is Caro who has brought to modern abstract fulfillment ideas which began to struggle upward at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The degree of that accomplishment can be judged not merely by the sculptural divigations of the intervening period, but by the difficulties of a sculptor as recent as David Smith in reaching similar ends. In what appears his most abstract work Smith constantly referred to the upright human body and to ways in which representations of that body should enter the ground. Although he experimented with architectural and industrial forms, such as carriages, he never wholly escaped standing motifs, even in his late Cubi. Moreover, the working of his surfaces and the patterned polishing of the stainless steel Cubi represent the last evidence of modelling in wax and clay, analogues to Rodin's vibrant, light-catching, and broadly-modelled surfaces. Only in one of his last pieces, *Cubi XXIII* (1964), did Smith make bold to develop a piece of sculpture directly along the ground, and then he almost certainly did so under the influence of Caro. Nor is *Cubi XXIII* among his most successful works. Thus, for all that it seems a creation of infinite ease and simplicity, a piece of sculpture such as Caro's *Wide* (1964) stands unrivalled as the total transfiguration of previously partially-realized ideas, the ultimate legatee of the tradition of the reclining figure.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VERNON YOUNG

The Friends of Graham Greene

. . . as a producer he [Hitchcock] has no sense of continuity and as a writer he has no sense of life. His films consist of a series of small "amusing" melodramatic situations: the murderer's button dropped on the baccarat board; the strangled organist's hands prolonging the notes in the empty church; the fugitives hiding in the bell-tower when the bell begins to swing. Very perfunctorily he builds up to these tricky situations (paying no attention to inconsistencies, loose ends, psychological absurdities) and then drops them! they mean nothing: they lead to nothing. . . .

Turn of the Tide is on a quite different plane from Mr. Flaherty's bogus and sentimental picture. Mr. Flaherty's direction is hopelessly "literary," he lays beauty on inches thick. . . . But Mr. Norman Walker is concerned with truth; he doesn't trouble about silhouettes on skylines, and the beauty his picture catches is that of exact statement. The ordinary life of a fishing village, the competition between lifeboat and salvage tug, the changing market prices, satisfy him: he doesn't have to *invest* drama as Mr. Flaherty does, who painfully reconstructed a type of fishing which the Aran islanders had not practised in living memory.

. . . She is, of course, the finest filly of them all. . . . And yet a dreadful inertia always falls on me before a new Garbo film . . . that magnificent mare's head of hers will puzzle our descendants, seeking a more obvious beauty, as it stares dumbly from the printed page, caught in a still in Napoleon's embrace, in Armand's embrace, in—the fictional names fail us—Frederic March's embrace, John Gilbert's embrace. A great actress—oh, undoubtedly, one wearily assents, but what dull pompous films they make for her, hardly movies at all, so retarded are they by her haggard equine renunciations, the slow consummation of her noble adulteries. She is a Houyhnhnm in a world of Yahoos, but, being Yahoos ourselves, we sometimes yearn for less exalted passions, for people who sin for recognizable reasons, because it's pleasurable. . . .

. . . Herr Jannings has the meaningless gaze of a sea-lion with huge sloping shoulders and watery whiskers, to whose emotions we apply, for want of anything better, such human terms as pity, anger, terror, though we cannot tell, on the evidence of those small marine eyes, whether he is really registering anything more than a dim expectation of fish. . . .

TO HAVE ONE'S LONG-STANDING ANTIPATHIES confirmed is always a pleasure; for this reason, among others less exclusive, I am delighted to find Graham Greene's film reviews from the late Thirties collected in a single showpiece volume,[1] profusely illustrated with stills from movies most of which are memorable only because they were occasions for Mr. Greene's inexhaustibly adroit malice (though I should add, since I appear to have got off to a negative start, that his admirations were conveyed with a finality equally picturesque!). After years of

[1] GRAHAM GREENE ON FILM, edited by *John Russell Taylor*. Simon & Schuster, $12.50. Published in England as *The Pleasure Dome* (Martin Secker & Warburg).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rereading tributes to Robert Flaherty's unmitigated documentary realism, none of which confess that *Nanook of the North* was this man's sole, unarguable masterwork, it is immensely refreshing to see him described as, of all things, hopelessly literary! I can hear a long grey line of MOMA Film Department directors turning over in their graves, or, if still among the obdurately living, *preparing* to turn over if, in the future, anyone repeats Mr. Greene's amiable heresy. The world never alters as radically as we sometimes hope, or fear, that it will. Wars come and go, islands rise from the ocean and sink again, palace revolutions replace one set of hooligans with another, one's ex-wife becomes a stanchion of Womens' Lib, one's hair ignominiously thins or falls out, and we learn a little, we pride ourselves, about the probable sources of it all. But just as there is always someone left who can listen without dismay to the *Toreador Song, Tales From the Vienna Woods* and *Ol' Man River,* so, among "film people," there is always someone to perpetuate, in program notes or at the film-society lectern, the brainless eulogies and euphemisms which have circulated, unimpeded by remorse, around the images not only of those cited by Mr. Greene but also of many others I shall not identify now lest I disgrace myself with senile repetitions.

Mr. Greene claims that he undertook film reviewing partly for "fun" and in part as a relief from the daily discipline of writing novels. That he had fun should be plain, except to those too touchy to smile, from the extracts I have quoted above; that he was properly serious beyond the limits allowable in a weekly (*The Spectator*) whose readers in those days were not expecting the last wise words about a perferably unwise entertainment, is equally plain as you peruse the contents of this checkered collection. One should remember (how can anyone of appropriate age forget?) that this was an era, gauche and spectacular at the same time, when some of the worst films in living memory were produced: the daft musicals of Hollywood and Vienna, the stilted adaptations of Russian and English literary classics, the Astaire-Rogers formula, the Petrified Pimpernel formula, the astigmatic *angst* of Bette Davis, the cheap nihilism and laborious puns of the Marx Brothers, the anti-War films from Burbank and the pro-war films from Berlin: one's memory halts before the ultimate banalities which were served to a paralyzed public during the years of the Moscow trials, the Depression, the rise and mushrooming terror of the Third Reich—need I go on?

And perhaps the most impressive feature of these reviews, when you consider the subject matter with which they were coping and after you have made allowances—for the sometimes frustrating brevity imposed by the entertainment columns, for the unevenness of execution (whose would not have been?) and for the surprising tolerations Greene permitted himself (I'd hate to be confronted with some of the stuff *I* thought was noteworthy, circa 1937!)— perhaps the most

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

impressive feature, I repeat, is still Mr. Greene's sense of reality. I prefer his sense of *unreality,* where film content is concerned, for as a confidential agent of the macabre he was unsurpassed; but here I mean the feeling of live issues, debated without pedantry, pulsating through the exotic metaphor and the quirky affections; the staggering disparity he conveyed, with a pronounced lift of the eyebrow, between the relentless tripe he was required to say something reasonable about and the engulfing tragedy which history in daily fact was piling up.

Greene was a man of the world, not just a man on the aisle. Beside his professional eye for the craft—he never blamed the director for the faults of the writer, nor confused the actress with her cinematographer (or her cosmetician) beside these sensible, elementary precautions, he had an authoritative, even huffy, knowledge of what went on in a number of places. He knew just *why* the secret service operation being depicted was bogus; he was creditably informed on military and parliamentary protocol; he couldn't be fobbed off with seductive travelogues of the Belgian Congo or solemnly accredited reports from a Welsh mining village: he always knew what was being inexcusably passed over or tidied up or plainly faked. He complained perennially, with a smile becoming ever more weary, at the travesties of Catholic rituals perpetrated by Jewish and Protestant studio hacks. Above all, he shrewdly knew what you'd suppose any film critic would know if he knew nothing else: *who,* when it comes down to it, makes and distributes the movies! Today, in America especially, the critic regarded as highbrow talks as if film scripts were written by English Department Ph.D's (when they have been, what catastrophe!) and were financed by men of high culture and boundless good will. Listen, for a second, to Mr. Greene.

> Watching the dark alien executive tipping his cigar ash behind the glass partition in Wardour St., the Hungarian producer adapting Mr. Wells' ideas tactfully at Denham, the German director letting himself down into the canvas chair at Elstree, and the London critics (I speak with humility, I am one of them) exchanging smutty stories over the hock and the iced pudding and the brandy at the Carlton, I cannot help wondering whether from this great moneyed industry anything of value to the human spirit can ever emerge.

The wonder remains, at least in my mind. Since Mr. Greene's day at the movies, the personnel he specifies is of another breed (I don't say a better breed, but I wouldn't say a lesser one) and the artists of the medium have, for the most part, won every privilege then denied them. You'd have to have been imprisoned in a film archive since War II not to acknowledge that even though the worst films

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

now are as bad in their own way as the worst of the Thirties and earlier, the best are incomparably better. Even so, even so—I have never been able to decide whether movies have corrupted more minds than they have entertained (enlightened is a concept I shant even risk): there are so many collorary aids to corruption in our contemptible society that such distinctions are fairly fruitless.

Returning to Mr. Greene: knowledge of the world may not be the single indispensable asset for a film critic but he's alarmingly insubstantial without it if he attempts pregnant conclusions on anything beside the cutting tempo, the relevance to his own suburb of psychology or the calisthenic accomplishments of the camera operator. Greene, as critic, had something beyond all this, every bit as valuable as his international experiences and his flair for political issues: his style, of course, yet we say nothing if we don't stop to ask ourselves from what source the style was acquired. He had something I name with envy, since to write about a popular art and not share that something is to remain ineffectual. Greene had the common touch: the common touch and the uncommon style; this is the unrivalled combination (the tale-teller's combination) that inspired, among the routine credits and disparagements of his weekly chore, those sudden compassionate penetrations which, transfixing the topic of the moment, move off the page and into your mind for years, as journalism rarely does and as literature should: in, for example, his startling apotheosis of Peter Lorre—

> Those marbly pupils in the pasty spherical face are like the eyepieces of a microscope through which you can see laid flat on the slide the entangled mind of a man: love and lust, nobility and perversity, hatred of its self and despair jumping out at you from the jelly.

—or, in a more sustained instance, his remarkably compact and atmospheric analysis of Julien Duvivier's *Un Carnet de Bal.* Compact as it is, I can't quote all of it. After protesting, moderately, that the general device is somewhat dreamy—the nostalgic widow revisiting, some thirty years after the event, the men with whom she had danced at her first ball—Greene moves into closeup and in fewer than a score of lines confounds all of us who labor at the art of synopsis, recreating ethos, setting and witness point inseparably, pauses for a telling comparison with another director's effort, and in those two shaking sentences at the end reaches the heart of the matter (I find his personal substantives unavoidable!):

> . . . in one episode we have Duvivier's real greatness—the seedy doctor of Marseilles so used to furtive visitors and illegal operations that he doesn't wait for questions before he lights the spirit flame: the dreadful cataracted eye: the ingrained dirt upon his hands: the shrewish wife picked up in God knows what low music-hall

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> railing behind bead curtains: the continuous shriek and grind of winch and crane. Nostalgia, sentiment, regret: the padded and opulent emotions wither before the evil detail: the camera shoots at a slant so that the dingy flat rears like a sinking ship. You have to struggle to the door, but you can run downhill to the medical couch and the bead curtains. There has been nothing to equal this episode on the screen since *Pepe* [Le Moko]. It makes Renoir's *Underworld* [The Lower Depths], a slow agreeable undistinguished picture based on Gorki's novel, about a thief and a bankrupt Baron and a dosshouse-keeper and innocent love, oddly stagey and unconvincing. The dosshouse squalor is laid Dickensianly on, but you never believe in its aspiring thief, its poetic madman, its old philosopher, its virginal affection. This isn't what poverty does—tatter the clothes and leave the mind unimpaired. The genuine poverty is in Duvivier's Marseilles flat—the tin surgical basin, the antiseptic soap, the mechanical illegality and the complete degradation.

Here, if anywhere in Greene's book, is a performance to which we may confidently point if we need to argue that film reviewing can sometimes be an art! *The Pleasure Dome*—not an altogether accurate figure for the kind of experience Greene was at his best transcribing, but as an invocation for the collection, itself, one of his major "entertainments," it satisfies me. For my taste, this volume belongs on that shelf, about five inches long, where one keeps books about the perishable art which are worth the rereading.

I suspect, for I haven't the knowledge to assert, that Greene's favorite contemporary films in the 70's are not those you might name, on the grounds that they embody the empirical values, domestically situated, for which as a critic he fought!—*Kes,* or *The Go-Between* or *Family Life* or *Loving Memory* or *The Raging Moon,* or any of a hundred and one excellent documentations on the British television networks. With time we become notoriously diffident towards the reformations we strenuously advocated and helped to install. In any case, Greene's contribution to fiction, on screen or off (and for that matter to non-fiction), while showing a proper respect for truthful reporting, for the pathos of being Nobody and for the dingy corridors where myths of heroism are born, has never been strictly naturalistic; nor, without twisting the term into obliquity, can it be described as "sociological." He has remained an exotic; there is something quite un-British about his gift: the dark underside, the distrust of amenities, the withheld alleviations: not really Russian, not precisely French, he is nonetheless, even in his most perfunctory work, closer to continental psychology than he is to that of Robert Louis Stevenson or Charles Dickens. Yet I saw an American film

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lately, directed by an Englishman (I don't know if this helps or hinders the argument), which I felt Greene might warm to—*The Friends of Eddie Coyle*—because it represents a world Greene, himself, long ago predicated, though there is nothing in it of his special ambience: this it could scarcely have, for it takes place in the hard-edged light of Boston, whereas a story by Greene is unthinkable without the Gothic shadows of a European city or the peeling façade of a bullet-pocked courthouse in the tropical zone, where a feeble facsimile of liberty is enforced by bayonets and imported machine-guns, and all visible animals have protruding ribs. But the political world everywhere has all too successfully been imitating the Graham Greene novels; of these, the very titles have announced the drift: *It's A Battlefield, This Gun For Hire, Loser Takes All.*

The Friends of Eddie Coyle (scenario by Paul Monash from a novel by George V. Higgins) gave me the not wholly neurotic impression that there are essentially only two worlds, Ours and Theirs, the latter consisting of criminals-and-police who wage an armed truce but might any day form an alliance which would spell the obliteration of everyone else. (If I had seen the film in the U.S.A. I would have probably slunk home, hugging the shadows!) I think Greene would appreciate the restriction of characters in this story to a "ministry of fear," maintained within an exclusive network of cops and robbers, hoods and informers. The legally respectable citizen has no valid existence; he is mere object: a bank employee made to sit on the floor or stand with fingers clasped at the back of his neck while the alarms are disconnected and the safes emptied. When one of these nonentities is shot in the guts for tripping an auxiliary alarm device, our concern is not solicited by a lull in the narrative. We forget him, just as the masked hoodlums forget him, save as a nuisance; the object is to get away, get on with the action. The quiet force with which Peter Yates directs his continuity has no parallel among the many crime stories which have zoomed, piled up and exploded on the American screen in the last few years. Scrupulously understated, the film flows from one episode to the next with a soft and rapid click-click, like an express train crossing the switches.

It's a closed-circuit system; director and writer do little to assist your sympathy or your disapproval. At the heart of this system—if you can think of a heart in such a context—there is an undercover Treasury Department agent, Foley (Richard Jordan), who has strategic connections among ex-cons and potential lifers, kept on their toes by his smiling threats and his cool promises of clemency. All they have to do is feed him information; when he sifts it, making five of their two-plus-two, he may have something the squads can crack down on. He may have a red herring. Foley pivots on himself, conveying an air of confidence and of indifference to his surroundings, but as he smiles his sweet assurances, the eyes in the back of his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

head are fully employed. "Have a nice day," he says politely to the hooked salmon he is preparing to reel in. Eddie Coyle (Robert Mitchum) is a middleman who buys guns from a tough greenhorn, Jackie Brown; his best customer is Scalise, head of a bank-robbing league, aiming at a payoff which will support him in Florida for the rest of his days. (The morality is aptly bourgeois and pious, given point by Coyle delivering guns to Scalise in a bag of groceries, and the give-and-take, when it's not thieves' argot—you'll need a glossary—, has a distinctly Boston Catholic edge; you assume that most of these jokers, including Foley, attend Sunday morning Mass.) Watching everyone else is Dillon (Peter Boyle), apron-bellied and deadeyed, a saloon-keeper operating without a license because he supplies Foyle with reliable rumors.

The resolution is beautiful, the way truth, in these matters, is beautiful—like the mechanism of a self-winding watch. Since Eddie Coyle, of all characters in the film the nearest to being lovable (his *wife* loves him!), faces arrest which will deal him a second term in prison and put his wife and kids "on relief" (don't you just weep at the social inequality?), he sacrifices young Brown to get himself off the hook. This is not enough to please "Uncle" (i.e., the Treasury Department wheels who control Foley). Reluctantly, Coyle agrees to sell out Scalise, but he's too late. Dillon is on the job before him. From the available evidence, Scalise is convinced that Coyle is the informer; his last testament before retiring to the penitentiary instead of Florida is the hiring of a hood to settle Coyle. The hood is Dillon. After stuffing Coyle with hamburgers and beer at a hockey match, he shoots him in the head as they drive home.

"Uncle" is pleased. Dillon, at his final meeting with Foley, is given a new lease on life. As for Coyle, whom Foley couldn't save anyway, no questions are asked. For the moment, "Uncle" is satisfied to have Scalise salted down and packed in ice. Why raise the embarrassing question: what happened to Coyle? As the defecating pigeons rise in scattered flocks to fly and re-settle in the Government Center, Foley beams his parting smile at Dillon. "Have a nice day!" . . . If you're one of those who disapproved of *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The French Connection* because you felt your "sympathy" was enlisted against your will, you may be equally censorious of Yates's "neutrality." But if you're tough-minded enough to sit for two hours without the director stroking your back and confiding to you every twenty minutes that of course he's Against Crime, see *The Friends of Eddie Coyle.*

Have a nice day.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

STEPHEN FARBER

Movie Crazy

MOVIES HAVE TURNED IN ON THEMSELVES. More and more films seem to be drawn from other films rather than from life. In Hollywood many young filmmakers, fresh out of film school and encouraged by the success of Peter Bogdanovich (*The Last Picture Show, What's Up, Doc?, Paper Moon*), want to recapture the spirit of the formula movies of the thirties and forties; their pictures are pastiches of bits and pieces drawn from earlier comedies and melodramas. Although the movies of John Ford and Howard Hawks emulated by these young directors were often deeply flawed in their own right, they expressed an intense personal vision of experience. Hawks, like Hemingway, actually lived the rugged life of adventure that he celebrated—and sentimentalized—in his films. The new American filmmakers have spent so much time in theatres and screening rooms that it often seems as if they have nothing to make movies about except their responses to other movies.

The same thing is true of many European directors. In France the New Wave directors (Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol) spent their youth watching Hollywood movies; but at least their films, though cluttered with references to other movies, attempted a serious commentary on Hollywood myths. In *Breathless,* one of the seminal New Wave movies, Godard's hero was a young thug who took his style from Bogart. In subsequent movies like *Band of Outsiders, Contempt, Alphaville,* and *Pierrot le Fou,* Godard continued to speculate about the influence of popular movies; developing his own distinctive tone of casual, rueful irony, he created characters who struck poses borrowed from the movies and spoke in the glamorous style of their silver screen idols.

Movie-obsessed characters have begun to turn up in more popular movies. Woody Allen's *Play It Again, Sam* is essentially a farce version of the *Breathless* theme—a comedy about a bumbling film critic who tries to live up to the image of masculinity and romance personified by Bogart in *Casablanca.* Stephen Frears's *Gumshoe* is a wry, tender study of a second-rate nightclub entertainer in Liverpool who also dreams of playing Bogart; he sums up his ambitions, "I want to star in *The Maltese Falcon,* I want to record 'Blue Suede Shoes,' and I want to play Las Vegas." His fantasies isolate him: the slipshod amateur gumshoe is so hypnotized by the adolescent poses embodied in romantic movie kitsch that he is unable to establish an adult relationship with anyone.

Although making movies on movies can turn out to be very

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

insular and precious, the influence of popular culture *is* an important contemporary theme, and at least for those of us who have grown up with the movies, it holds an undeniable fascination. At any rate this self-absorbed mode of moviemaking is becoming too popular to ignore. Films about filmmaking itself are also in demand. *The Way We Were* was the first movie to deal—although superficially—with the Hollywood blacklist, and others are in the works, along with film versions of *The Day of the Locust* and *The Last Tycoon.* In the past movies about Hollywood (*Sunset Boulevard, The Bad and the Beautiful, The Big Knife*) were usually designed as exposes of corruption and decadence, condemning but secretly adoring the privileged, glittering world of celluloid stars and sycophants. Fellini's *8 1/2* was a different kind of movie-absorbed movie (though equally flamboyant)—a portrait of the artist as harassed film director, focussing on his creative crisis before beginning a new production. François Truffaut's *Day for Night* follows a director into production; it is the first movie that concentrates on the actual process of shooting a movie. Truffaut has put all of his experience into this glorious tribute to the movies as twentieth-century magic show.

Day for Night is conceived as a loving satire on the peculiar obsessions of movie people. Truffaut captures the vanity of actors; when asked to discuss the film they are shooting, each actor describes his own character as the protagonist. *Day for Night* also contains some tart observations on the single-mindedness of the director, Ferrand (played by Truffaut himself), who is immersed in the shadow world of movies. All of the books he receives are studies of movie directors, and even his recurring dreams are movie-saturated—he recalls stealing stills from *Citizen Kane* when he was a child. Off the set he uses all experience as raw material for his movie. Every relationship is coolly scrutinized; no confessional is too private to appropriate. When he comforts his leading lady during a marital crisis, she reveals her feelings of despair: "I've decided to live alone . . . I know that life is rotten." Shortly afterwards, she finds that he has incorporated that very dialogue into a new scene he is writing for her. Even when one of the actors is killed in a traffic accident, Ferrand is immediately figuring how to revise the script to use the available footage and "cover" his actor's death. Nothing is allowed to get in the way of completing the movie.

When Ferrand uses his star's private confession in his script, it is not simply a sign of his insensitivity; for he recognizes that she is *dramatizing* her feelings in language that might have come from a soap opera. Truffaut's most important theme is the blurring of distinctions between movies and life. *Day for Night* often plays like a Pirandello comedy, filled with complex parallels between the real-life actors, the characters they play in *Day for Night,* and their roles in the movie-within-the-movie, a romantic melodrama called *Meet Pamela.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The plot of *Meet Pamela* is vintage movie melodrama: A young man brings his bride home to his parents' country estate, where she and his father fall in love. The triangle ends in tragedy when the bride's car hurtles over a cliff, and her husband shoots his father in the back. Although this story may seem ridiculously melodramatic, Truffaut slyly demonstrates the connections between the stock situations and the actors' lives offscreen. Alexandre (Jean Pierre Aumont), who plays the father, says at one point that he has died twenty-four times in films—and never once a natural death. Near the end of shooting *Meet Pamela,* he is actually killed in a traffic accident. That may seem arbitrary, but Truffaut is declaring his faith; he is clearly saying that the world of illusion has its own authority, and that life imitates art. This theme is extended throughout *Day for Night.* Alphonse (Jean-Pierre Leaud), who loses his bride in *Meet Pamela,* loses his real-life girlfriend as well; she runs off with an English stuntman. Julie (Jacqueline Bisset), who has an affair with an older man in *Meet Pamela,* is in fact married to a much older man—the psychiatrist who helped her through a nervous breakdown. (One wonders if she had been reading *Tender Is the Night.*) Ferrand comments that she can understand the father-son rivalry in *Meet Pamela* because in Hollywood there are so many sons (John Barrymore, Jr., Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.) who have tried to match the achievements of famous fathers. In other words, the banal plot of *Meet Pamela* is very close to her real experience; or to put it another way, she seems to have designed her life in imitation of movie melodrama.

Almost all the people in *Day for Night* declaim in the swollen style of Hollywood movies. Severine (Valentina Cortese), the older actress with a drinking problem, is a self-conscious theatrical grande dame who might have stepped out of *All About Eve.* Alphonse, the childish temperamental star, sees himself as a gloomy romantic hero. "I'm in agony," he moans after his girlfriend leaves him. "You know, you can be terribly in love with someone you despise." When Julie slips down the hotel corridor after spending the night with Alphonse, she is in a trench coat; even offscreen, she goes on playing romantic melodrama. Their lives have become indistinguishable from movie cliches. That is why when Alphonse says, "Life is more important than films," it is one of the richest jokes in the film; these people have been totally *possessed* by movies.

This may suggest that *Day for Night* is a harsh attack on movie people. In truth, although it pokes fun at the egotism of actors, the film is really a love letter to a group of fabulous monsters. The clear-eyed but affectionate attitude toward actors helps to explain Truffaut's superb work with actors throughout his career. Similarly, Truffaut mocks the romanticism of movies (including his own earlier movies) without destroying all our illusions. The scene of the candlelight costume ball in *Meet Pamela* is almost a parody of a scene in *Two English Girls;* but when Ferrand puts on a record of Georges Delerue's lush theme music, and the crew stands entranced

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by the charade, we laugh even while we are swept up in the fantasy romance.

Setting out to deglamorize movies by exposing all the tricks, hard work and crazy accidents that contribute to the manufacture of illusions, *Day for Night* ends, ironically, as an inescapably romantic tribute to the filmmaking process. It captures the exhilaration of the work, and the happy feeling of improvisation on a set dominated by affection rather than envy. One long tracking shot sums up the crazy chaotic activity: As Ferrand approaches the studio, four people walk in and out of the frame before he has crossed the street; the set designer shows him the blueprint for one of the sets, the producer comes to inform him that he will have only seven weeks to complete the film, the hairdresser asks him to approve a wig for one of the actresses, and the prop man brings him a sample of guns for the climactic scene. In any hour Ferrand is confronted with half a dozen crises; he must choose the right gun for his hero, coax a recalcitrant cat into a scene, and decide how to rewrite the script for an unexpectedly pregnant actress or readjust the shooting schedule to stay within the budget. Each problem solved is a minor triumph. Few films have ever dealt so convincingly with people at work.

For Truffaut the work itself is obviously as meaningful as the results. In *Day for Night* he celebrates the *process* of transforming experience through art. The film opens with a meeting between Alphonse and Alexandre on a crowded street; the camera guides us through the crowd to the central action, then finally pulls back to reveal that the action has been staged. We watch the scene played a second time, and then one last time from behind the cameras, as the red boom rises above the crowded street. Seen from this perspective, the action is hopelessly confusing; we realize that it is the presence of the movie camera, with its highly selective eye, which provides clarity and order. In another characteristic scene Julie climbs a ladder to a false window attached to a simple cardboard platform that is supposed to be a bedroom. Yet when the camera shoots from inside the "window" toward the house across the lawn, the illusion of being inside a room is convincingly rendered. Seeing the same set from two perspectives, we participate in the *creation* of romance.

Day for Night expresses every film buff's dream of what working on a movie must be like—an intense, consuming experience shared with a temporary family of likable and charming people. This spirit of conviviality is undoubtedly exaggerated. Maybe in France the making of a movie is a joyful communal venture, but I doubt it. Are all the crew members intelligent movie freaks? Would the script girl and the producer really knead a bowl of butter to satisfy one of the star's whims? However, this unreality gives the film its charm; it is intended as a comic idyll, not a documentary. *Day for Night* is no less quixotic than *Meet Pamela,* but for those of us even peripherally involved with movies, the fantasy is hard to resist.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Truffaut deliberately stretches the truth to present the ideal working situation that he imagines: The filmmaking company is a genuine community; for a short period personal problems are forgotten, and everyone is caught up in the spirit of sacrifice. When the film is completed and the group finally disperses, it is a strangely melancholy conclusion. For an instant the process of filmmaking seems emblematic of all experience—rich and full of meaning for concentrated periods, but fragile and evanescent; everything vanishes just at the moment of deepest satisfaction. *Day for Night* is a lovely evocation of the world of filmmaking, but it is more than an insider's movie; it expresses Truffaut's humanism—his belief in communities built on mutual regard—and the same gently melancholy vision that informs all of his movies. Truffaut's sense of proportion is exquisite. He never tries to inflate the slight story, but his precision gives the comedy resonance. Taken on its own terms, this is just about a perfect movie.

A very different perspective on movie mania is provided by Terrence Malick's first film, *Badlands*. Malick's sensibility is unlike Truffaut's, and some critics, expecting a more overwhelming emotional experience, have attacked *Badlands* for its coldness. That is as relevant as criticizing Picasso for not being Renoir. *Badlands* was conceived as a sardonic study of lives influenced by pop culture—an intriguing dark version of the themes explored in *Day for Night*. Malick will be an even better director when he can be more open to the surprises of character that might complicate his theories of human behavior. But if Malick lacks Truffaut's incandescent humanism, he has an equally important talent—intellectual rigor, which is a rarity among American directors.

Badlands is based on the killing spree of Charles Starkweather and Caril Fugate in the late fifties. In telling another story of young lovers on the lam, Malick plays against the sentimentality we have come to expect from new-style crime movies like *Bonnie and Clyde, Dillinger,* or *The Sugarland Express*. Malick's criminals are not beautiful, charismatic young lovers; Kit (Martin Sheen) is a psychopath who kills without passion or remorse, and Holly (Sissy Spacek) is a numbed, docile teenage majorette who goes along for the ride. Malick has no romantic illusions about his youthful outlaws; they are depressingly ordinary products of their society. One of the most acerbic moments is when Kit, hiding out in a rich man's house, records a little speech on the businessman's dictaphone: "Consider the minority opinion, but try to get along with the majority opinion." Kit is a "rebel" with the conformist philosophy of President Eisenhower.

Both Kit and Holly have been brainwashed by the media, and they want to be movie stars; crime is the only road to celebrity that is open to them. Malick contrasts the barrenness of life in smalltown America with the gaudy romantic fantasies advertised by the media. Holly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pores over movie magazines, and she narrates the film in the purple prose style of *True Confessions* or *Modern Screen*: "Each lived for the precious hours when he or she could be with the other." Although the narration occasionally turns studied, Malick sustains the inflated rhetoric with astonishing wit and invention. He recognizes that Kit and Holly imagine their futures in the terms of pop music and a thousand B movies, the corrupted modern versions of traditional American myths. After killing her father, Kit takes Holly off into the woods, and they live in an elaborate tree house protected by ingenious animal traps and secret caverns in the earth. Then they set off across the Great Plains like two desperadoes of nineteenth-century legend. Kit plays the role of a Western outlaw or a romantic gangster from *High Sierra,* and he is quite self-conscious about his image. As Holly says, "We lived in utter loneliness, though Kit said 'solitude' was a better word. . . . He dreaded the idea of being shot down alone, without a girl to shout out his name." Frightened but enchanted, Holly seizes the opportunity for the mad love experienced by Susan Hayward or Joan Crawford: "I sensed that my destiny now lay with Kit, and that it was better to spend a week with someone who loved me for what I was than years of loneliness. . . ."

There is clearly a connection between Holly's indifference to murder and her completely synthetic romanticism; she seems incapable of responding to anything but mass-produced cliches. Holly and Kit have been so mesmerized by kitsch fantasies that even violence does not seem real to them—the blood looks too much like catsup. In describing his murder of Holly's father, Kit explains, "He was provokin' me when I popped him. That's what it was like—a pop." Holly does not actually participate in the murders, but she watches Kit kill seven people, and her only response is to say to herself, "Kit was the most trigger-happy person I ever knew." Some people may conclude that Malick is simply blaming the media for these murders, but I think he offers a more comprehensive sociological explanation: These kids' lives are so desolate, so bereft of possibilities that their only escape is through fantasy. They live exclusively in a world of illusion. They no longer see the dust or the blood; their eyes are on the red balloon that Kit sends above the fields with a message testifying to their undying love.

Malick is very harsh in exposing the enervation of rural America, and the fraudulence of media romance. Yet he understands the appeal of Hollywood-inspired dreams, and he is not simply contemptuous of his young zombie lovers; he knows how little time they have for daydreaming. Holly will eventually become a normal middle-class housewife. It is purely by chance that she meets up with Kit, and for a while she allows herself to be drawn along by his determination to live out the movie fantasies that intrigue her. But Kit is too dangerous; after a few adventures, she wants to return to the safe anonymity of smalltown life. Driving toward the badlands of Montana, Holly sees

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the lights of Cheyenne in the distance, and she yearns for domesticity: "I made a vow never again to get mixed up with the hellbent type, no matter how much I might love him." And although her true confessional language is comical, we can still feel a poignant sense of loss when she decides to settle down to a completely ordinary middle-class nightmare. As she leaves Kit in a police helicopter, a startling low-angle shot of the helicopter rising conveys a sense of release, and of finality; her doom is sealed.

In spite of his sardonic view of Holly and Kit, Malick lingers over a few tentative moments of lyricism—when Kit sends up that red balloon, when Holly walks in a white sheet along a forest stream, or when she looks through her father's stereopticon at photographs of Rio de Janeiro and Egypt, and dreams of "being carried off to some magical land." Kit and Holly deliberately *create* their own poetic moments, as when they stop the car in the wilderness and get out to dance to Nat King Cole's "A Blossom Fell" in the glare from the headlights. The poetry may be self-conscious and slightly threadbare, but it is touching because it represents a desperate, futile search for possibilities beyond their own drab, familiar world. At these moments Malick retains his distance from the characters' fantasies while showing a guarded respect for the extravagant gestures that tantalize them. Trashy movies and pop songs provide their only contact with the romantic and the extraordinary; if the media have deadened their responses to real violence, their second-hand dreams represent a profound longing for the unattainable. When Holly looks at old photographs and muses, "I wondered where I would have been this very moment if I'd never met Kit, or if my father had never married my mother, or if my mother had never died," we can recognize that her "deep" thoughts come from Johnny Ray songs; but the moment is poignant because this is the last time in her life when she will have the freedom to imagine romantic or mysterious possibilites for herself. That sense of melancholy enriches the film's black comedy, and makes *Badlands* a wistful, emotionally complex consideration of lives molded by the media.

This is an extraordinary first film. Malick actually has ideas, and his themes have been worked out with surprising coherence. Besides, he demonstrates a brilliant flair for eccentric dialogue, a striking eye for cinematic composition, and a fine control of actors; Martin Sheen and Sissy Spacek give beautifully modulated performances. *Badlands* could only have been made by someone who had grown up with the same swollen pop fantasies that bewitch Kit and Holly. Malick has the movie-shaped sensibility of so many filmmakers of his generation, but he is trying to clear away second-hand responses. What makes *Badlands* important is its devastating ironic commentary on some of the more disturbing implications of the movie madness that other young filmmakers simply exalt.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

OH TO BE IN BROOKLYN, NOW THAT ENGLAND'S THERE, the American drama lover might have sighed upon learning of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's imported British drama season extending through much of winter and spring. In fact, however, there was more than a little disappointment. First came the Royal Shakespeare Company, which opened with John Barton's production of *Richard II*. This was an attempt to reconcile Brechtian distanciation with Brookian reinterpretation. There was abstraction here, as in the unit set, two narrow stairways rising into an A-shape, between which a platform ascended and descended, and in the hoopskirt horses the actors rode and jousted on. There was totemism and shamanism in the costumes, masks, and stilts some of the actors occasionally donned. There was alienation in the ever-present awareness of this being a company of actors all in identical basic brown costumes with minor additions to denote rank, and in the way the part of the King went, at play's outset, to one of two actors contending for the crown, so that one day Ian Richardson played Richard, and Richard Pasco Bolingbroke, and the next day vice versa. Much was made of the medieval *Mirror for Magistrates* aspect of the play: there were interpolations from *Henry IV*, to show Bolingbroke likewise coming to grief; choric reiteration of certain hortatory lines first spoken by a principal actor; a golden, royal mask appended to the crown turning in the end into a death's-head. As in his *The Hollow Crown* (scheduled for later on in the season) and in his and Peter Hall's treatment of the entire Shakespeare history cycle some years ago, Barton was sermonizing on the transitoriness and meaninglessness of power.

But this homiletic function was not, I believe, Shakespeare's main intent. The great dramatist was more interested in juxtaposing and contrasting two such different and incomplete monarchs as Richard and Bolingbroke, each of whom had something of the ideal ruler but sorely lacked what the other one had—until the two halves came together in Henry V, equally endowed with imaginative intellectuality and shrewd strength of purpose. Even the acting, however, was off: Ian Richardson played Richard as an overripe pederast, and Bolingbroke as a cipher; Richard Pasco was an adequte, rough-hewn Bolingbroke, but a largely unconvincing Richard: sometimes fruitily stilted, sometimes just plain drab. But Barton's floundering did the greatest damage: thus Aumerle stood upstage center, gotten up with absurdist stylization as a snowman complete with pipe, and slowly melted, while downstage York related the story of Richard's abdication and removal to prison; but the next scene swung over to domestic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

farce, with comic dissension among York, his duchess, and his son Aumerle. Pedestrian notions, such as having Gaunt deliver the England speech on his knees, rather like the mad Lear, alternated with far-fetched, ridiculous concepts such as having the groom who visits Richard in prison turn out to be Bolingbroke, or having the jailed Richard, in a nightgown, hoisted aloft by ropes, so Exton can shoot him down with an arquebus.

The whole production bore witness to an essentially unimaginative mind's desperate efforts to be original and innovative, and it left me with a deadening sense of what happens when an academic director is afflicted with Brookomania. We can see it over here in the work of such directors as André Gregory, or that wretched young Yale product who staged *Troilus and Cressida* for Papp at Lincoln Center as a transvestite version of *Juliet of the Spirits*. But the next Royal Shakespeare offering was scarcely better: *Sylvia Plath*, a vocal collage conceived and directed by Barry Kyle. It consisted of a potpourri of Plath's poems and autobiographical prose, along with biographical material mostly from A. Alvarez, and, in the second act, a Plath radio play that must have been bad enough with disembodied voices, but was even worse with disembodied bodies.

This is not the place to evaluate Plath's poetry, but what must be said is that even three talented actresses in poetically flowing gowns, dividing such nontheatrical material among themselves and acting it out with great verve, cannot make it dramatically viable. I am by no means against poetry readings by actors as long as they are just that, but to drag in a few sticks of scenery, some coy props, and to subdivide the poet into three interacting personae—a sort of notarizable triplicate—is as doomed an undertaking as trying to make a healthy sow's ear out of a dainty silk purse. Not that Plath's poetry is particularly ephemeral, only that no lyric poetry is theatre, being more concentrated and allusive, less earthy and dialectical than the stuff of the stage. Nor does dragging in bits of Miss Plath's life story help, unless it were properly dramatized; this way it is only a rather sad but unappealing case history. "She made me feel used," writes one of her lovers, Peter Davison, in his autobiography, *Half Remembered*, "as I later discovered others in her life had felt used." So much absorption with self, so little fairness for the other, can thrive in the lyric, but does not make for the two-sidedness of drama, the living agon. It is Plath *über alles*, and no contest. As for the current fashion of turning the late poetess into the torch-bearer of women's liberation, it makes about as much sense as if, as I wrote elsewhere, the suffragettes had claimed Mrs. Browning as their patron saint.

Yet at least the three actresses—Brenda Bruce, Estelle Kohler, Louise Jameson—all displayed genuine gifts, which could not be said for most of the cast of *Richard II*. To be sure some of the biggest names associated with RSC did not come over; still, so undistinguished a showing by the ensemble does not bode well. Only Tony Church's Gaunt achieved impact without mannerism. The same kind of uneven-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness characterized the next group of visitors, the Actors Company. This is a relatively new aggregation, a true actors' coöperative in which every performer has a vote in choosing the repertoire; the group collectively picks a director for each production, usually from the outside; and there are no stars—everyone plays everything from leads to walk-ons. It all goes to show, alas, the total inappropriateness of democracy to art. Though the company has some very able people in it, both the choice of plays and the choice of directors tended to be unwise: the plays usually too much for the group, the directors not enough. And distributing parts fairly among the actors proved less than fair to the audience.

What is needed in a theatre is a single controlling vision—or, bluntly put, an enlightened dictator. Most of the Actors Company offerings betrayed the lack of such a strong guiding spirit, although the opening bill was a pleasant exception: Chekhov's *The Wood Demon*, a ten years earlier initial version of *Uncle Vanya*. It was good to see the emergent genius in transition, the master only half out of the journeyman's cocoon. It was like seeing one of those Renaissance paintings whose principal parts were executed by the great painter himself, the rest finished by his disciples; by comparing the parts of the play retained in the later version with those dropped, one could assess at a glance what distinguishes genius from talent. The acting was generally commendable, although Tenniel Evans did not rise to the challenge of even this inchoate Vanya, here called George. Fascinating, too, in this play, excellently directed by David Giles in Kenneth Mellor's spare but cogent décor, was the twenty-nine-year-old Chekhov's unsureness of tone—tone, which was to become the ripe Chekhov's chief glory. Here George's suicide is treated almost entirely as a matter for comedy or, at best, apathy, and there is none of that remarkable Chekhovian tightrope act between persiflage and pathos. But *The Wood Demon* deserves to be seen at least once in its own right.

The group went on to *Knots*, a curious little collection of "knots, tangles, fankles, impasses, disjunctions, whirligogs, binds" that people get into according to R. D. Laing, on whose book of the same title this hour-long olio of monologues, duologues, song numbers, and clown acts was based. In a few minutes one got the point: how the neurotic psyche paints itself into a corner of self-hate from which no amount of sympathetic ingenuity can readily rescue it. After that, the show was only the heaping of ever more oblique and arch variations on an exhausted theme.

Next came a *King Lear* that was pure disaster, equipped even with an objective correlative: the ship bearing the sets and costumes did not arrive till after opening night. In the case of this masterpiece of masterpieces I was more than willing to say "off, off, you lendings," and settle for a naked and unaccommodated *Lear*. And, sure enough, David William, the director, was commendably straightforward in his approach, but straightforwardness without a truly penetrating imagination proved just as bad as the arrogantly obfuscatory cleverness of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Peter Brook. Except for making relationships as sexual and sadistic as possible, William contributed no directorial perception, and the casting of Robert Eddison, an apt comic but puny tragedian, as Lear was, to put it mildly, ruinous. He made the King into a thin-voiced specimen of injured pride, always on the brink of whining, as distant from the height of majesty as from the depth of pathos. So the company's most dashing performer, the colorful but rather hammy Ian McKellen, turned Edgar into the central character, complete with frontal nudity. But the tragedy of Poor Tom is considerably less moving than that of King Lear.

In the supporting cast, only John Woodvine's Kent was up to snuff, but Kent is pretty much of a foolproof part, although I have yet to see an actor portray the exiled Kent so as to make his disguise even moderately hard to penetrate, and, in this respect, Woodvine was no exception. If this *Lear* had any hallmark, it was a reduction to a demotic level, everyone sounding very much rural' English, or else downright Cockney, turning all the characters into poor Toms, Dicks and Harrys. But with the group's last bill, *The Way of the World*, again staged by David William, the shift was not in social status but in period, the action now being laid in late Victorian times, ostensibly to bring out its resemblance to the plays of Wilde. A foolish notion at best, and more so if you cannot afford to deck it out with Yellow Nineties finery. Performed amid impoverished settings and in cut-rate costumes, it reminded me less of Oscar Wilde than of Sebastian Melmoth. By way of updating, which included such things as telephone conservations and chauffeurs, the language too was simplified and, at times, modernized (which may have been the real reason for the shift in period), with the result that Congreve's now occasionally obscure witticisms became perspicuous witlessnesses. Sir Wilfull, for instance, was converted into a physical clown, a stagger-and-pratfall artist, which John Woodvine managed very deftly but, inevitably, at the expense of the play's high comedy. What took place was the very thing of which Congreve complained in the dedicatory epistle: the play was now aimed at those who "are better entertained with two or three unseasonable Jests than with the artful Solution of the *Fable*." The acting took some pratfalls, too, especially Edward Petherbridge's anemic Mirabell, and John Tordoff's and Matthew Long's unamusing fops. Caroline Blakiston was, all but visually, a fair Millamant, but to be merely fair in such a dazzling role is almost tantamount to being overcast. Sharon Duce's Foible came off best, along with Woodvine's Sir Wilfull, among the supporting players.

The last group to appear was the Young Vic, a 1970 offshoot of the Old Vic, now Britain's National Theatre. Founded and directed by Frank Dunlop, the company aims to mount plays inexpensively and reach broader audiences, including those aged fifteen to twenty, at prices they can afford. The first bill was *The Taming of the Shrew*, which made the Young Vic's objectives manifest. Christopher Sly was played by an American actor as a hippie member of the audience,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

high on pot, who mingles with and impedes the proceedings. Topical references were worked into the play, along with interpolations from other Shakespearian sources and pseudo-ad libs from the actors. Since *Shrew* is far from the kind of masterwork that forbids tinkering, these shenanigans ranged from harmless to genuinely diverting. In no significant way was the essence altered or violated, unless one boggled at the excessive playfulness that turned Petruchio into a somewhat fangless lion tamer, and Katherine into a somewhat unferocious shrew. Still, once things got under way, the fun was plentiful enough, even if the subplot suffered from a Bianca (Denise Coffey) who seemed to be on a stupefyingly giggly drug trip, and had no chin besides. Her suitors matched her lack of profile with a certain lack of zeal, but most of the other parts were played with great aplomb, and Jane Lapotaire, though rather a plain Jane, was a pleasing Kate.

Much the best, though, was the Petruchio of Jim Dale, an all-around actor whose successes range from musicals to television, from the Old to the Young Vic. He is a comedian who always draws the audience into his confidence, will even have a little chat with them, but whose broad comic strokes, verbal or kinetic, are redeemed by an engaging offhandedness, an absolutely blameless rascality. This has to do with faultless timing, mastery of the throwaway line, ability to look disarmingly unpretentious and coolly effortless while performing some quite demanding acrobatics, and simply exuding charm. There is mockery in him, but also blandness, and his bark is worse than his bite, but it's a pretty good bark, all the same.

Frank Dunlop's direction and Jim Dale's performance were even more fetching in *Scapino,* a British music-hall version of a present-day Neapolitan rendering of *Les Fourberies de Scapin.* It was part De Sica movie, part English panto, part Beyond-the-Fringe spoof, part French soufflé, and, finally, rather like one of those undauntable children's classics such as *Alice in Wonderland* that appeal to all ages and cross every cultural boundary. Never was Molière's motto, *"je prends mon bien où je le trouve,"* given a more graphic and compelling demonstration. And it was as if all had been designed to set to rights Argan's complaint, *"Ah! il n'y a plus d'enfants,"* for on stage as in the auditorium there were only children hurtling into delight. Carl Toms had whipped up a Neapolitan waterfront café setting, partly out of advertising posters on which Cinzano and Vesuvius nearly spilled over into each other, and partly out of various ramps, platforms, verandas, and swinging doors, plus one real rowboat moored on imaginary water. The audience at the Leperq Space sat on three sides, and the stage action romped in all possible directions.

From the very first moment, when Scapino, played by Jim Dale, was revealed on a café balcony accompanying his song on a guitar—a song whose words were gleaned mostly from the menus of Italian restaurants, and whose melody must have kissing cousins living in every street organ of Italy—we knew that anything could happen, and it did. There were sanity-defying puns like "A certain Geronte,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or Beronte . . ." "Emily Beronte?" and gravity-denying stunts, like the tossing from waiter to waiter of a plateful of spaghetti without the loss of a single strand. Or a bum would ride a bicycle full blast through the swinging café doors, followed by a loud crash; promptly the bum would be flying back out through those doors, followed by parts of the bike winging one after the other toward him. You were engulfed in fastness and unpredictability, and laughed before you quite knew what you were laughing at. Yet the seemingly incoherent inventions, including Dale's asides to the audience, qua Dale rather than qua Scapino, all blended into the structure and spirit of the original.

The last bill, *French Without Tears,* was rather a letdown. Be it said for Terence Rattigan that he himself has little use now for this his second play, which was an enormous hit back in 1936, largely, I should think, because of actors like Roland Culver, Rex Harrison, Kay Hammond, Trevor Howard, Jessica Tandy, and Robert Flemyng. That the Young Vic's revival should also have been a sizable success, I can attribute only to nostalgia, the sort of thing that over here enshrines a clumsy pseudo-fifties musical like *Over Here,* starring the lumpish Andrews Sisters. The main trouble—aside from the dim humor of Rattigan's play itself—was the somewhat plebeian flavor of most of the Young Vic's performers, ill suited to the caperings of upper-crust Britishers taking a crash course in French at Monsieur Maingot's villa in the South of France.

Dunlop's very direction looked *déclassé,* and the dialogue, which should have sounded like Baccarat goblets clinked together with fine insouciance, clattered along like tipsily colliding tankards. Gavin Reed, though amusing enough, made Lt. Commander Rogers of the Royal Navy into an aging queen unlikely to have navigated anything more nautical than a sunken bathtub, Andrew Robertson, as the Noël Cowardish hero, lacked wit and charm and a couple of inches to make him flush with his leading lady. As an insolent young pup of a swain, Alun Lewis was callow to the point of oafishness; as the martinet of a Gallic mentor, M. Maingot, Hugh Hastings looked as French as can be but could make his French dialogue neither French nor comprehensible. Poor Denise Coffey carried mousiness to the heights of rattiness, but Mel Martin was lusciously languid and frigidly flirtatious as the most British of Circes.

Yet if Brooklyn's British season was a mixed bag, so was Broadway's American one. Among its several overrated clinkers, I shall mention only *Ulysses in Nighttown,* a revival of the 1958 off-Broadway show that Marjorie Barkentin snipped out of *Ulysses,* concentrating largely on the Nighttown sequence. On a much bigger stage now, and with no more censors to contend with, the show is at present geared almost exclusively to carnality and nudity, as well as to fancier production values that obviate even the little need to rely on imagination, which once gave the show its modest interest. Now Molly Bloom speaks her famous soliloquy in the nude, but the more there is of Molly, the less

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there is of the soliloquy. Fionnuala Flanagan does well by the pitiful remnant, but Zero Mostel as Leopold seems less funny and touching now, perhaps because more Joyce has been cut, or because too much raunchiness and folderol has been added. How absurd these truncated bits of Joyce are, aswirl in a circus setting! How desperately the masters of one genre need to be protected from the hacks of another!

Off-Broadway did better: with *Bad Habits*, a pair of wicked one-acters by Terrence McNally, about two very different but equally weird mental institutions; *Fashion*, a musical semi-adaptation, semi-takeoff on Mrs. Mowat's play, with witty tunes and lyrics by Don Pippin and Steve Brown, and stylishly cynical book and direction by Anthony Stimac; and Miguel Piñero's *Short Eyes*, a play by an ex-convict performed mostly by members of a former prison acting group, which concerns life and death in a prison, and has enough tragicomic truth in it to make up for a certain lack of artistry.

But Broadway came up with one big gun, a revival of *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, which, though not one of O'Neill's very best plays, clearly belongs to his last and best phase. And it is one of those works that get better with each reseeing. True, the irritants remain, first and foremost the uncertain language, with its terrible built-in obsolescence. "Nix on the rough stuff, Josie," Tyrone, the tragic hero will exclaim, and, shortly thereafter, "Nix. Let's cut it out." Or he'll complain of "One of those heebie-jeebie nights when the booze keeps you awake . . ." and, again, "I had a good final dose of heebie-jeebies . . ." Then there are all those "Broadway tarts" who are "just gold-digging tramps," and even double nixes: "Nix! Nix! Don't be a fool, Josie. Don't let me pull that stuff." And if it isn't "nix!" it's as likely as not to be "nuts!" I suppose people may have talked that way once—some people, anyhow—but to put it on stage that untransmutedly and perishably was a mistake nevertheless.

There are other problems, too: in the way the exposition is handled, for instance; in the heavy, recalcitrant humor that often seems dragged in like an unhappy child torn from its slumber and obliged to do recitations for its parents' guests. But in O'Neill's last plays the flaws dissolve before the onslaught of all those feelings the unhappy man could not put into his life, only into his final works. There is in *Moon*, as in the rest of them, a passionate compassion, a torrential pity that isn't lessened by being in large measure also self-pity. For it is hard-won and genuine, based on unswerving insight and on true perception of the ultimate incommensurateness between what we would make of life and what it makes of us. The failings of the ear and the sporadic creakings of the construction are overwhelmed by that tragic vision that nothing extenuates, nor sets down aught in malice. The relationship between the huge virago Josie and her tough, conniving father, Phil Hogan, is complex and true and moving; and the relationship between this eternal virgin who pathetically pretends to be a whore and James Tyrone, the man whom a violent love for his mother has

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ruined for other women and for life itself, is more moving yet. These two, who can love each other so purely because they know, even in their wildest delusions, that they cannot be lovers—this woman too big, too clumsy, too tender-hearted, and this sodden, guilt-racked Oedipus only a few bottles away from the grave—spend a single moonlit night together. A night in which he confesses his semi-fantasticated sins toward his mother, weeps, and falls asleep; and in which she cradles his sleeping head in her surrogate mother's lap, and absolves him before he goes off to die, a little comforted, perhaps.

It is a play that cannot fail to touch anyone who is not put off by surfaces; and José Quintero directed it, without particular inspiration, but at least without getting in the way of his marvelous trio of actors. Ed Flanders is much too young to be the obvious choice for Hogan, yet he plays him, barring some excessive greybeardish lip-wetting, with fine gusto and at a properly breakneck pace, turning speed of delivery—words that must be got rid of between two drags on a pipe, two swigs from a bottle—into a defensive weapon: a barrier against thought-laden silences that would infiltrate his soul with their sadness. And Colleen Dewhurst, a bit overage, is still a powerful Josie, with that sweet-sour smile of hers and that raspy voice pierced by shiny-smooth peels of laughter, a voice that, when hoarse with emotion, is as welcome as a good, rough blanket on a freezing night. Miss Dewhurst is solid and tough, yet also womanly, and fulfills almost all of the roles impossibly contradictory demands.

But the best thing is Jason Robards's Tyrone. The actor has played this man brilliantly before, in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, when both Tyrone and Robards were younger. Now, after many setbacks and a near-catastrophe, aged and chastened, the actor brings to this haunted figure an awesome sincerity that tempers the old Robards bravura. Once Robards was apt to coast along on cleverness and charm (though never, be it said, in his O'Neill roles), but most of that has been pared away. Just a few roots of the former charismatic casualness remain, and what springs from them now is wrinkled, care-worn, and vulnerable, wistful and wry by turns, and painfully, nakedly human. The big confessional near-monologue of Act Three, with all those unspeakable lines ("You'd lie awake and watch the dawn come with disgust, with nausea retching your memory, and the wine of passion poets blab about, a sour aftertaste in your mouth of Dago red ink!"), is managed by Robards with magnificently minute shadings, rhythmic and dynamic variations, and with all the dignity of shouldered defeat. His voice is as cracked as his face, yet it leaps over its gashes and nodules. And the gestures, such as the overemphatic lighting of a cigarette; his movements, such as the walk, so consciously, laboriously springy—everything coheres and works. It is a definitive performance, absolution for how many of our nights, misspent in other theatres?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Siegfried's Revenge

BALLET IS A WOMAN'S ART. Or was. For two hundred years the ballet stage has been inhabited by beautiful females with uncanny skills of speed, balance, accuracy and elevation—women whose virtuosity gave tangible support to their stage roles as princesses or leaders, often endowed with supernatural powers. Countless ballet heroes have fallen helplessly in love with these splendid creatures. Countless men have unwittingly angered them and had to endure their punishment, or unwittingly pleased them and been rewarded. Even when the plot is a love story—and most of them are—the ballerina is what you go to the ballet to see. A male dancer hoping for stardom in this world learns to incline his head and step backward with regal deference.

Siegfried, the prince in that most classic of all classic ballets, *Swan Lake*, is a vacillating playboy who can't find the right girl. This annoys his mother no end, since he's just turned twenty-one and isn't giving a thought to what is apparently to be his only serious work in life, producing an heir to the throne. Instead he has the bad judgment to fall for an enchanted Swan who makes him swear eternal love. No sooner does he get back to the palace than he's tricked into betraying her by a magician's daughter. In despair, he rejoins his beloved and—depending on which version you see—follows her over a cliff or sees her taken away forever by the powers of Evil. Siegfried gets to dance only at those rare moments in the ballet when he's having a good time, but usually he suffers. His main job is to lift the ballerina and look noble.

Much of Western literature paints women as idealized figures, and the nineteenth-century ballerina embodied this ideal, with her stage partners bowing and scraping in the background. Villains, clowns, slaves and other exotics often did stunning solos in these old ballets, but the sensational "character dancer" somehow always stands lower in the ballet hierarchy than the more elegant leading man who dances less.

Even the great Nijinsky achieved his fame primarily in a series of character parts; he was an ornament to the story rather than the protagonist. His role in *Le Spectre de la Rose*, perhaps the first ballet that totally belonged to its male lead, was an extension of both the effete prince and the sensuous but not quite real character part.

The Spectre, a vision conjured up by a girl who has just been to a ball, is hardly what we would call a paragon of masculinity. When American Ballet Theater revived the work two years ago, with Paolo

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bortoluzzi and Carla Fracci, I wondered how anyone could have thought this petal-covered, limp-wristed, gently smiling creature had anything to do with the male image. A more romantic friend explained that the Spectre represented a virgin's ideal man in 1911. There must be people who accept these ultra-chivalrous figures as models of masculinity. Woman certainly gets the best of it—this non-threatening, non-demanding partner defers to her and allows her to assert herself without losing her femininity. Siegfried in another role is Leslie Howard as Ashley Wilkes.

Serge Diaghilev's phenomenally successful Ballets Russes revised the world's concept of Western ballet, and the role of the male dancer with it. Over the company's two decades of existence (1909-29) Diaghilev collected and presented a fabulous array of men and women dancers, choreographers and allied artists, Nijinsky among them. His last great male star, Serge Lifar, embodied the physical beauty and nobility of the romantic hero and excelled as a dancer. In addition to successes in the classical repertory, Lifar created roles in such precedent-shattering works as George Balanchine's *Apollon Musagète* and *The Prodigal Son*. These were true heroes at last, not just gilded playthings come to life.

In the new field of modern dance, where women were again the principal dancers and also created most of the choreography, Ted Shawn and José Limón made particular efforts to secure a decent position for men. When Shawn's company of men dancers made one of its early tours in 1935, a woman writer in Atlanta said that before she saw them, "the very idea of male dancers disgusted me." She was converted by the company's forcefulness and muscularity, its avoidance of the sissy image. Shawn had concentrated on pure dance and ritual, incorporating folk, religious, sport and work motifs appropriate to men. Limón made dramatic dances for an all-male cast—*Emperor Jones, The Traitor*; he based several scenarios on the conflict between two powerful men, played by himself and Lucas Hoving; and in general he tried to choreograph for the particular qualities of men as contrast or complement to those of women, rather than in subordination to women.

But equality of the sexes, in dance as well as life, hasn't worked out yet. I think the early modern dancers were searching for it. Doris Humphrey more than anyone could use men for their tenderness and women for their strength, without making them seem neurotic. But Humphrey was avowedly Utopian, and the idealism of the early modern dance grew weaker while its message got more simplistic. Humphrey's community of powerful equals has evolved into a futuristic land of androgynes and look-alikes.

Today a lot of dance isn't concerned with discovering new forms and new roles at all, it's concerned with telling a story or exhibiting a technique. A great deal of it is popular dance, and as such it trades

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in popular stereotypes. The men are virile and the girls are feminine in the old familiar ways. We hardly notice how this reinforces sexism because it's so attractive and entertaining.

At the same time as this trend toward more accessible, naturalistic characterization, we've seen a sort of male backlash developing, whose concern is not to show the depths and confusions of sexuality, but to draw very clear, corrective models. Some years ago Erik Bruhn refused to dance *Swan Lake* any more. Bruhn, probably the greatest danseur noble of our time, said that as a contemporary man be could no longer believe the traditional *Swan Lake*. He choreographed his own version, with the prince as the central character. In his version, danced by the National Ballet of Canada, Siegfried resents his bullying mother, and meets his downfall by choosing spiritual over sexual love. The villain has become a woman, called the Black Queen, alter ego of Siegfried's domineering mother.

This Siegfried isn't any more independent than the nineteenth-century original—he's still the victim of women. But he rebels against their power and bids for the audience's sympathy. Suddenly, as people have started re-examining other legendary plots, lady villains and traumatized heroes are flooding the stage in a great outpouring of Oedipal spite.

The Biblical brothers Cain and Abel showed up a couple of years ago as symbols of the creative nonconformist versus the conventional drone, in a dance called *Sin Lieth at the Door*, choreographed by the Israeli Moshe Efrati. The famous fratricide was instigated by a female Demon. John Butler's *According to Eve*, for the Alvin Ailey company, showed the two brothers as pawns of their mother's favoritism. Ailey's star dancer, Judith Jamison, started the rivalry by loving up Abel and spurning Cain, then she stood around wringing her hands while the two men struggled spectacularly.

Eve, the great Mom of us all, is the originator of Sin if you want to look at it that way. Even the Serpent is often played by a woman, as in Maurice Béjart's *Nijinsky, Clown of God,* for example. Béjart's *Nijinsky* goes further, re-interpreting the life of the great dancer to show him as an innocent whose art, sanity, and finally his life are destroyed by a predatory woman. A childlike Nijinsky flourishes happily under the thumb of the impresario Diaghilev, his mastermind, father and lover, until the advent of the classic temptress he eventually marries. The marriage costs Nijinsky his friends, work, and Big Daddy. His sexy wife thereupon turns into a symbol of spiritual love.

The renunciation of heterosexual love and/or the identification of woman as an eternal threat to man's existence are recurrent themes in today's dance. A whole series of ballets could be grouped under the title "The Making of a Homosexual." Antony Tudor's *Undertow* (1945) established the genre, with its disaster-prone plot and mandatory meanies: parents who show their rejection of their son by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

having violent sexual relations, the young girl who's too naive to give him real love, the pack of boys who initiate him into sado-masochistic manhood, the woman of the world who awakens castration fears. We're getting the same message, less literally, from ballets as vicious as Jerome Robbins' *The Cage* (1951), a charming little story of a tribe of female insects who kill their lovers after using them for impregnation, or as innocuous as Béjart's *Firebird* (1970), which does away with a story entirely to become an abstract representation of the revolutionary spirit.

Can there still be a mind romantic enough to see *The Cage* as a fantasy, to pretend those aren't real women doing that horrible number on real men? As for *Firebird,* the original ballet was about a Russian prince who catches a magic bird and sets her free; later the bird rescues him and his princess from a troupe of monsters. I agree with Bejart that this story "seems lame," but note that the good angel and principal dancer is a woman, the monster king is a man, and the rabble are up to no good. In Béjart's *Firebird,* the glorious mob is dressed in fatigues and smudgily made up so you can't tell the men from the women. The Firebird who passes Idealism on to them with a kiss is a man, and after his demise he is succeeded by another male, the Phoenix. There's no villain at all, so the revolution turns out to be a cult, inspired solely, as far as the audience can see, by the beauty and fervor of the hero, and of course by his male-ballerina dancing.

These ballets, despite their aura of homosexual propaganda and anti-feminism, are part of a larger drive to redeem the status of men in dance. Alvin Ailey recently revived Ted Shawn's all-male *Kinetic Molpai* in his continuing effort to preserve the classics of American dance, and the Limón company has retained its strong male orientation even after its founder's death. Many smaller dance companies have rejected on principle the old habit of featuring women while keeping just enough decent male dancers around for a few special roles.

Even some of our big ballet companies are doing away with female superiority. The Joffrey Ballet seldom uses a traditional corps de ballet any more, and this spring its company roster listed four more men than women. Striving to maintain its middle-American glamour image, the Joffrey has taken a path somewhere between the old-fashioned, women-centered ballet and the new anti-feminism, and its chief choreographer, Gerald Arpino, has come up with a number of neo-classic ballets in which the men and women are surprisingly evenly matched. In these works Arpino demanded that both contingents work hard all the time; there are no long lines of girls in the background counting two to the left, two to the right; nor are the men relegated to carrying baskets of grapes or holding up the maypole. But in his hippest, most "modern" works, *Trinity* and *Sacred Grove on Mt. Tamalpais,* men have the major dancing roles

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and establish the personality of the piece—the speed-soaked evangelists of *Trinity* and the blissed-out guru of *Sacred Grove*—while the women are reduced to ciphers.

While Arpino tries to preserve both male and female identities, more choreographers fall back on unisex. Several European companies—Béjart's Ballet of the XX Century, the French Ballet Theatre Contemporain, the Netherlands Dance Theater among them—have scrapped the old repertory and tried to give men and women more equal dancing responsibilities. All dancers are costumed in streamlined leotards and tights. Girls never wear skirts, though they do wear toe shoes. By virtue of their physiques, men and women dancers are specialists—women can dance on pointe, can be lifted in the air; men can jump and turn and support. But the ballets are asexual. They're athletic, or spiritual, musical, moralistic, humorous, but they bypass or depersonalize any reference to sexual relationships. An increasing number of American modern dance companies have adopted the same approach.

Attempts to solve the problem of using men and women more equally while acknowledging their sexual differences have so far tended to look backward for a one-to-one reversal. Kenneth MacMillan successfully substituted a squad of Russian naval officers for the traditional corps de ballet in *Anastasia*. For the 1972 Stravinsky Festival at the New York City Ballet, Jerome Robbins choreographed *Scherzo Fantastique,* a pas de deux backed by an ensemble of three men. Gelsey Kirkland and Bart Cook did flashy Bolshoi-type lifts and chases, complemented by the fast and aerial corps.

But simply replacing men in the positions once held by women can, it seems to me, only lead to the same exploitative practices on both sides. Other than bigoted racial contexts, dance and the homosexual community are the two places I know of where grown-up male persons are commonly referred to as boys. Classic ballet has always carried an unspoken sexual come-on. Virtuously offering the notion of woman as gifted, gracious and morally good, ballet literally presents her in the flesh. When the ballerina languidly unfolds her leg into a high extension or stretches her torso into an arabesque, she's calling attention to a shapely ankle, an arched instep, the long straight bones and the rounded hip and ribcage. You can't mistake it if you're alive yourself.

Nor can you be unaware of the sexuality of modern ballet's strong, sleek, handsome men showing you thighs, buttocks, bulging baskets. The nineteenth-century ballet functioned quite openly as a showcase where dandies picked out their mistresses and little chorus girls found lifelong protectors. Perhaps inevitably, the featuring of men in ballet has created a new theatrical meat market. "I'm sure women's lib would agree it's about time that men got their turn at being regarded as sex objects for a while," wrote a *Dance Magazine* reviewer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in justification of a recent boy-beautiful ballet. I'm not aware that women's lib has ever tried to keep the status of sex object all to itself. In fact, I find the idea of any intelligent person wanting to grow up to be a sex object rather ludicrous, but it seems we have to take the suggestion seriously because so much dance these days is primarily a homosexual pitch.

Men as dancers and artists, and men as theatrical prototypes, are robbed of their full humanity as the roles reverse themselves, and so are women. The heroines of story ballets, after all, were remarkably bright girls. They were always thinking up ways to outwit the authorities. For every tinsel Sugar Plum in the old-time ballet there is a compassionate Giselle, a benevolent Lilac Fairy, a clever Swanilda. Even the lady villains usually had some reason to harbor their grudges.

Today's leading men seemingly don't need any dimension or character, nor do the women who oppress them. Take two contemporary trios, for instance, Louis Falco's *Huescape* and Kenneth MacMillan's *Triad.* (The latter also has a small male corps de ballet.) In both dances, the two men are interested in the woman and in each other. The woman represents a threat to their friendship/romance because she's a possible companion to each of them. The dance is played out on the level of movement tensions and balances—a cat's cradle of arrangements and entanglements and undoings—but the dancers as people are rootless, motiveless, existing only for the time between the rise and fall of the curtain. Take Béjart's *Symphonie pour un Homme Seul.* The hero, He, and ten pals are working hard at representing Mankind, when the heroine, She, comes around bothering them. Why are they disconcerted? Why does He look so tormented by her advances? Not for any reason we can see, except that she is female.

Why do the couples in Brian McDonald's *Time out of Mind* look as if they're trying to disembowel each other every time they embrace? Why is the woman in George Balanchine's *Variations pour une Porte et un Soupir,* an obvious parody and put-down of the whole genre, shown as luring the man into a trap rather than offering him pleasure? We can no more imagine this man turning down the woman's provocation, though it's an obvious source of anguish to him, than we can see Kay Mazzo deciding to stay with her girl friends in *Dances at a Gathering* instead of running off with Peter Martins at the slightest tilt of his eyebrow.

This isn't simple warfare between men and women. The message goes beyond sexual partisanship. People in these ballets are passive, typecast, abstract. They are prisoners of their own biology. Their sex determines their role in society and their role in the dance. The man is always either a stud or a sensitive ambiguity. The woman is always a calculating bitch or a clinging vine. The ballet doesn't need to explain them or excuse them, or give them half a chance to rearrange their fate. It's the old dehumanization game again. I hope we're not going to be stuck with that for another two hundred years.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reviews

SONYA RUDIKOFF

La Querelle des Femmes

"La querelle des femmes"? It is not an American term, but we could do worse than follow the lead of Germaine Brée, the well-known scholar of comparative literature. Of course we know what the subject is, even though its boundaries shift frequently and its complexities are notorious. The initial debate which provides the term emerged at the end of the fourteenth century, and of course in France, when Christine de Pisan, the noted writer, chided her contemporaries for their views of women. But as Professor Brée observes, the "querelle des femmes" makes repeated appearances at every juncture of social change. Indeed, the condition of women in society itself is a clear index to social change, so there should be no surprise in finding the literary condition of women similarly illuminating.

The condition of women in literature? By this may be meant several things: primarily, the literary productions of women writers, how they are regarded in histories or over-views of the period, whether in fact they are regarded at all, objectively recognized and accorded their true value. Of equal concern are the following matters: whether specific professional opportunities are available to women writers, with or without discrimination, whether there is in fact any such thing as a *woman writer,* or feminine literary art, and what are the implications when such a possibility is either acknowledged or disputed. There are, further, the contiguous social questions which may be introduced, such as the state of women's education, the ideology of feminism or careers, the social origins of literary women, their social and marital status, and the stage of public morality. How far does the literary situation for women share all the problematic and tendentious questions of the literary situation for male writers? Is there a generally problematic literary situation at this time of mass communication and indifferent literacy, in which *all* writers find themselves at risk, or can a special aspect of the situation be isolated, an aspect of concern to women writers alone?

Professor Brée's effort to disentangle some of these strands is presented in a short book made up of her 1973 Brown and Haley lectures at the University of Puget Sound. A recent book by Anthony West casts another light on the subject by means of three close and detailed studies of Madame de Staël, Madame de Charrière, and George Sand,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in which the subject of women as writers is part of an assertion about the psychology of literature. And, in one of the extraordinary books of the past year, Nigel Nicolson presents the secret autobiography of his mother, the writer V. Sackville-West, and his own commentary on an unusual and successful variant of the literary marriage and the special conditions of life for this woman writer.[1]

The French are an admirable and gifted people whose literature often seems preoccupied with the intricacies of passion. Thus, perhaps it is not surprising that a French woman writer should have produced the most influential of feminist books in recent years—I refer of course to Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*—or that the problem of women writers in France should be examined by Professor Brée as almost a paradigm of the entire matter. She is not the first, of course: two hundred years ago Mme. de Staël explicitly linked the condition of women in society with their status in literature, and even speculated that the life of women in England was the main reason for the "inexhaustible productivity" of English novelists, because of the "sensibility and refinement" of their relations with men and in the family. Professor Brée too shares a developed sense of social analysis as she speaks of Louise Labé, of Colette and Marguerite Yourcenar, but her principal interest is in the social condition of literature itself as it affects the work of women.

A useful point of departure seems to be the way the histories of French literature have ignored the work of women by a kind of rewriting of history, and, in consequence, the way in which this distorted history has provided a rationale for invidious distinctions and discriminations against contemporary women. Indeed, the distortion mitigates against the very idea of the seriousness of women's writing. It is a delicate matter: were the women absent from the authorized histories because they didn't exist, or, as in Soviet rewriting of history, were most of them deliberately left out? Were the genuine contributions of the rest greatly minimized, and was the distortion then used to buttress the enforcement of invidious distinctions? Of course, Christine de Pisan was famous and valued in the fourteenth century, as were Montaigne's brilliant adopted daughter, Marie de Gournay, and Marguerite d'Angoulême, Francis I's sister, in the sixteenth. Of course Madame de Sévigné and Madame de Lafayette stand out: but has their entire supporting milieu been erased? Have the value and achievements of women been deliberately ignored? Have the social constraints, the *images-guides*, the legal and political disenfranchisements, the whole network of social institutions —have all these reinforced a picture of women writers in France that is inevitably distorted, inaccurate, and unjust?

[1] WOMEN WRITERS IN FRANCE: Variations on a Theme, by *Germaine Brée*. Rutgers University Press. $5.00. MORTAL WOUNDS, by *Anthony West*. McGraw-Hill. $10.00. PORTRAIT OF A MARRIAGE, by *Nigel Nicolson*. Atheneum. $10.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Professor Brée navigates among these shoals with finesse and experience—necessarily, or the subject would be swamped in waves of ideology and contention. Her lectures merely allude to topics and sub-headings and implications of the sort that have concerned many commentators for some time. She throws out along the way innumerable interesting observations, such as that the Romantic idea of genius was as detrimental to the development of women writers as the Romantic idea of woman-as-instinct so beloved of French belle-lettrists, and the Napoleonic family imperatives. The idea of genius has of course hampered *all* writers, not only women, by forcing them into debilitating contest with the masters of the past. Who can estimate what damage a writer like Norman Mailer has done to himself by such self-flagellation? Women writers have been both more and less damaged by such rankings, because despite the public reinforcement of their exclusion from the ranks of the great and powerful, the very universality of the challenge has freed women writers from the necessity for such public risk-taking. Colette, for example, was less concerned to equal Racine or Balzac or Mallarmé than to be worthy of the moral example of her mother, and took her place among the immortals anyhow.

Another most interesting observation brings to our attention the salons and the capable, intelligent women who presided over them, from *les précieuses* to Ninon de Lenclos and Proust's Madame Strauss and the Comtesse de Greffuhle. The stories of the mistresses of these salons belong more to the history of women's emancipation than to the history of women in literature, if only because presiding over a salon does not afford much time for writing, nor does it direct the mind toward solitude or interior reflection. Literary images also play a part in the history of women writers in France, the images of the natural instinctive woman, the woman-as-child, the expressive, lyrical, ostensibly untaught nature of women's literary gifts. And, throughout the whole story, repeatedly referred to by Professor Brée, is the matter of women's education, which remained largely non-existent until 1881 when women's lycees were established. When Joseph de Maistre's daughters begged for an education like their brothers', he refused the plea because no woman had written the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, *Phèdre*, or *Tartuffe*! Until quite recently that rejoinder, or its variants, seemed sufficient to deal with the matter, despite the important contributions of educated women in the professions. And in some quarters it still serves to perpetuate the inequities noted by Christine de Pisan. As for the future of women writers in France, Professor Brée rather somberly notes that they must share in the fate of male writers, and that the entire literary situation is gloomy and problematic.

An English writer, Anthony West, supplies a modern vocabulary for the ancient quarrel, and could almost provide another text for Professor Brée. As one reads on in his curious book, wondering about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the title—"mortal" because all share in being wounded, or because the wounds are fatal?—it comes as a surprise to see Mr. West so deliberately scarifying the wounds with an arsenal borrowed from Dr. Eric Berne, of *Games People Play*. The point of the effort is explicit: this study of Madame de Staël, Madame de Charrière, and George Sand, ostensibly an examination of literary "behavior," is actually another skirmish in the "querelle des femmes." Apparently irritated by the renown in which Madame de Staël and George Sand are held, especially renewed as it is in this recent stage of feminism, Mr. West proceeded to tumble them from their pedestals by means of a psychology of transactions and "games," that is, of social and psychological maneuvers in which certain underlying psychic constellations are re-enacted for the psychic benefit of the instigators and the loss of the victims. Behind the rather vulgarized parlor-game psychology lies the more substantial hypotheses of transactional analysis, which introduces certain ideas of ritual exchange, response, transference and acting-out. It is a bit puzzling to know why this particular hypothesis has been employed by Mr. West for these ostensibly literary illuminations, especially when other psychologies might yield more, for example, those that concern themselves with symbolism, the imagination, and the primary process, symbolic elaboration, and so on. It becomes a bit clearer when Mr. West indicates his deep interest in Lawrence and Proust, James and Flaubert, an interest focusing on the circumstances that turned them into writers.

Anyone who thought that Edmund Wilson was the last adherent of the old wound-and-bow theory of creativity will be surprised to see it brought out again with such earnest naivete. Inevitably the ancient pitfall of that theory becomes explicit in Mr. West's pages: the suggestion that the work of the imagination is determined by the pain of psychic wounds then becomes, in critical usage, a means of avoiding literary discussion of textural response, substituting instead gossipy insinuation and moralistic attack on the writer. This turns into a particularly malevolent sort of attack without the redeeming features provided by a complex understanding of art in relation to psychological strategy. It becomes rather repellent in the context of Mr. West's scolding of Proust for his homosexual evasions.

One need not be a feminist to note how this skirmish is launched with a consideration of the "mortal wounds" of three *women* writers. Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*, with its intense passions and its explorations of emotional bondage, is regarded as almost a factual report of the hero's sexual life; Constant's shabbiness and dissembling are examined but his literary productions are not so tidily linked to *his* wounds. Indeed, not only Constant, who loved both Madame de Charrière and Madame de Staël, but also Chopin, Musset, and Boswell (who wrote about Madame de Charrière as Zélide), not to mention Napoleon himself, who detested Madame de Staël—all are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

regarded as almost completely reliable reporters providing about these women evidence apparently unblemished by any "wounds"! Actually, the only way the wound-and-bow theory has any validity at all, even of a crude sort, is if it is used as a universal hypothesis; so, too, with the psychology of games. Not only the rich daughter of M. Necker, or the red-haired cad she bewitched, or the patient motherly soul who renounced the young cad, or the woman who wore men's clothes and seduced weak young men, but all, all are involved with the games and maneuvers. It will not do merely as a theory of the motivation of certain famous writers whose personalities were unpleasant or whose fame we might not consider quite justified!

Nor is it literary *behavior* which interests Mr. West so much as the behavior of certain literary figures. He relishes all the details of Constant's family, of Mme de Charrière's, Constant's involvement with Charlotte von Hardenberg, his attempted escapes from Madame de Staël, his evasions, strategies, deceptions, letters, his efforts to cling to both Charlotte and the formidable Germaine, the wild jumping in and out of carriages, fleeing *to* Coppet, *from* Coppet, to and from the small provincial hotels of Switzerland, France, and Italy, Madame de Staël's flights to and from Paris, her defiance of Napoleon, his gaping at her cleavage, her seductions of the innocent, her financial affairs—all the endless comings and goings with which such people occupied themselves before trains, telephones, jet flights, automobiles, or cables. Madame de Charrière also is presented in this way: there are gay mocking descriptions of her attempts to become a savant, her considerations of various marriage proposals, the efforts of her family, the travels, the house in the country, the place in town, the special room where she entertained Benjamin, the letters, reactions, scruples, strategies, and defeats. Then, there is the same fusillade for George Sand: the unsavory milieu, the dreadful mother and grandmother, the convent, the marriage, the affairs, the lesbianism, then Sandeau, de Vigny, Musset, Merimée, Chopin, the illegitimate children scattered throughout the tale, the traipsing around, the money, the estates, the bitter relation of mother and daughter, the complicated law suits, the involved families. Along the way George Sand may have published a novel or asserted a political position—just as Madame de Staël or Madame de Charrière may have written a few things!—but these are dismissed by Mr. West as "bizarre," "pretentious," "absurd," or "ignorant," and are scrutinized only for evidence of frigidity, lesbianism, ambition, narcissism or something else. George Sand emerges as dishonest, unloving, socially stupid, politically naive, unscrupulous and more. Madame de Staël is socially stupid also, in addition to being vulgar in her dress, power-mad, irrational, frigid (or insatiable), monstrous, miserly, untalented, and so dreadful that she could not possibly be a match for Napoleon, let alone a threat to his measured and enlightened political advance! The relentlessness of this deter-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mination to unmask and debase a famous intellectual woman, whose work is regarded as valuable not only by feminists, but by political philosophers of both sexes, comes finally to seem *over-determined*, as another psychological vocabulary might call it.

Perhaps the question Mr. West really wanted to ask is whether to be a good writer or artist one has to be a good person; or, a further one, what sort of life helps a writer to work well? And still a further question: if a writer is patently disturbed, destructive, or cruel, how does our knowledge of this affect our response to the work? Is a woman writer more "wounded" than a man? These questions are simply not broached, although they are implied, and they are surely more important than those we are urged to entertain. Even the matter of the social conditions of literary production, a most absorbing subject, could have engaged Mr. West's analytic efforts more substantially, if he were not so limited by a narrow mechanical conception of the psychology of literary effort:

> Fiction is part of the general pattern of behavior of the person who writes it, and the more we know of that general pattern, and the function of the given work of fiction within it, the better our chances of understanding that work. The necessary corollary to this statement is, of course, that the aesthetic and sociological approaches to the novel as such are not likely to tell us very much about it. The essence of the form is a pathology, not an aesthetic, and if it can be said to be any one thing, that one thing is literally to be a mirror for the necessities which bear most urgently and pressingly upon the writer as an individual.

I suppose all that needs to be said about this absurd passage is that someone who can write or believe it will believe anything. Perhaps Mr. West should have read Madame de Staël more closely on literature in relation to social institutions!

The shades of Harold Nicolson and V. Sackville-West must be grateful that it was not Mr. West but their son, Nigel Nicolson, who discovered and published the secret autobiographical fragment which is the basis for *Portrait of a Marriage*! The Nicolsons met and married before World War I, and were married for nearly fifty years until she died in 1962. He was a diplomat, writer, journalist, and Conservative M.P. She was a writer too, of poetry, historical fiction, gardening books, and was notably the subject of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. Had she been male, she would have inherited ancient and historic Knole, the largest English house still in private hands, the place where she was born and formed. Both Harold and Vita were great gardeners and letter-writers, both were homosexual, both were part of that early twentieth-century world where Bloomsbury touched politics and wealth and aristocracy. The autobiographical fragment discovered after her death was Vita Sackville-West's recounting of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her own homosexual life, with primary emphasis on her attempt to elope to France with Violet Trefusis, the failure, and the ultimate resolution. Nigel Nicolson includes selections from Harold's letters, his diaries, as well as Vita's, Violet's, Lady Sackville's, and others.' When the elopement was foiled by the husbands, parents, and by the ambiguous wishes of the principals themselves perhaps, Vita returned to Harold and her children, and lived out her divided life. Although they were never to resume a sexual life, Harold and Vita were enormously devoted to one another, and their life, their love, their common projects all reinforced the initial intensity of their early relationship. They hated to be apart from one another, they wrote volumes of letters, he from diplomatic posts and from London, she mainly from the country (Kent) where she was solitary, gardening and writing. When she died, he wept inconsolably.

An "ideal marriage"?! They valued their eternal love and trust above any passions which might bewitch them. "Harold was like a sunny harbor to me," she said. The companionship and understanding preceded passion and endured beyond it. In typical late-Victorian and Edwardian style, Vita regarded her homosexuality as perverse, dishonourable, shameful, a curse and burden. She saw herself as split between two natures, one brutal, sensual, domineering, and the other, devoted, thoughtful, poetic, kindly, "seraphic and childlike." Harold knew nothing of the first, savage, part: "it would drive over his soul like an armoured chariot," and although he touched upon it several times, she felt he could no more understand it than her six-year-old son could understand algebra. She kept *that* life apart from *their* life. Like English peers attracted to sailors and prostitutes, Vita was often sexually drawn to unscrupulous or *louche* women who were boring or stupid or vicious. Virginia Woolf's qualities, combined with her talent and her madness, awed Vita too much for an explicit sexual relationship. None of these "muddles," as Harold called them, challenged *their* attachment, which was almost like that of old playmates. The infatuations, travels, letters, flights to Paris and Amiens and Italy, the discovery, pursuit, triumph, defeat, retreat—it had a color and excitment quite consonant with the drama of Knole and the Sackvilles and roistering Elizabethans that Vita felt she had inherited. Then, too, Violet's mother had been for years the mistress of Edward VII—the well-known Mrs. Keppel—and Vita's earlier love, Rosamund, was related to the Duke of Westminster. The Sackvilles had had their illegitimate children, Spanish mistresses, and other mixtures of passionate and peaceful life. Lady Sackville was herself an Edwardian flirt, dangling J. Pierpont Morgan, Rodin, Lord Kitchener, Sir Edward Lutyens, William Waldorf Astor, and others, and holding on to her resident admirer, the wealthy Sir John Scott, heir to half of what became the Wallace Collection. The whole tapestry of Knole thus presided over Vita's own adventures.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Vita's writing and gardening show how importantly Knole and its meaning figured for her. She had begun early to write, and like many children of her time and class, she put on elaborate masked entertainments for the servants. By the age of fifteen, she had written a 75,000 word novel about Knole in the reign of Charles II, and over the next three years, she wrote eight full-length novels (one in French) and five plays, plus poetry. By the age of seventeen she had written another historical novel of 120,000 words! She went on with that material, which always intoxicated and fascinated her. She seems never to have known a moment's hesitation as a writer, and even though several of her books were popular and financially successful, she seems to have written almost entirely for her own pleasure. Virginia Woolf did not admire her friend's work greatly, and we may be inclined to agree with that guarded judgment, although the gardening books and the column in *The Observer* were useful and valuable. The gardens themselves seem to have been quite original. Vita made her first garden at Knole when she was eleven or twelve, an enormous "V" planted all in cress. At Long Barn, their house near Knole from 1915 to 1950, she and Harold took a dilapidated cottage—where Caxton was said to have been born—and the rubbish dump surrounding it, and made a garden. Later they bought Sissinghurst Castle, another ruin and rubbish dump, this time Elizabethan, and there too made a magnificent and interesting English garden. They tried odd things, revived and discovered old plants, did whatever they liked, in the great tradition of Victorian and Edwardian gardeners. The houses were not ordinary, and neither were the additions and renovations: the towers, separate children's and nannies' cottages, separate sitting rooms, cottages, walks bordered by different kinds of thyme, old stone walls blanketed in Mme. Alfred Carrière climbing roses. It might not be so grand as Knole, but it was remarkable in its own way.

Long Barn of course required always at least three servants and two gardeners, which was nothing if one had grown up at Knole with its sixty servants, its entertaining, its improvements, its rents and its extensive operations. Still, the only time Vita lacked for money was when she and Violet had to sell jewelry in Italy to finance their escapade. The importance of money in this as in every story of women writers cannot be underestimated. Madame de Staël's enormous fortune, George Sand's holdings, Madame de Charrière's inheritance, all such resources provided important support for activities and adventures which would have been prohibitive for most women, indeed, for most men as well. Professor Brée observes of almost all the women writers discussed that their accomplishment, especially if it involved defiance of social custom, must be seen in the light either of their own personal fortunes, perhaps combined with the freedom granted by aristocratic lineage, or their professional activity growing out of immediate necessity, as when Christine de Pisan had to support

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

herself and her young children, or in the case of Colette who lived by her wits. The financial independence was no guarantee of anything, but it enabled such women to counteract the obvious and compelling pressures which historically restricted women's personal and professional liberty. One has only to reflect on the history of marriage settlements, and on the fate of heiresses before married women were able to own property, to arrive at certain serious problems attending the achievement of women.

Vita Sackville-West certainly enjoyed to the fullest extent that "room of one's own" and the accompanying income which Virginia Woolf thought essential for a woman writer's career. What she seems not to have had was any career outside the room. She never went as a diplomatic wife to those foreign posts, she rarely went to London after the failure of her elopement, and she was not much interested in the world beyond her. The flight to France with Violet took place during the Peace Conference of 1919, but she hardly knew it was going on, or that Harold was an important young diplomatic assistant there. Her interior drama was always the only thing that mattered to her. Even through all the events of the Twenties and Thirties, even the War, her letters show her indifferent to them and ignorant. Unlike Madame de Staël, taking the world as her stage, with her Coppet circle, and her travels, and her awareness of Napoleon, the Czar, the German and Italian diplomats, and unlike George Sand also, with *her* political involvements, and unlike Louise Labé, or Marie d'Angoulême, or Marie de Gournay, or Simone de Beauvoir or Marguerite Duras or Nathalie Sarraute, Vita Sackville-West disdained the public life of her day, but grandly. The failure of the famous elopement was also a failure of her attempt to live in the world even if dressed in man's clothes, or crazily, or under a masculine identification. Thereafter, she made few further attempts but lived in the world of historical fantasy. The room of her own and the income made all of this retreat possible, instead of leading toward a more *engagé* or active independence. In her case, it was not history or the pressure of society or even any exclusion from education or professional opportunity which was important, nor would Vita Sackville-West's career have been much affected by the measures of emancipation or reform that Professor Brée sees as so sorely lacking in the French situation. This daughter of the Sackvilles was quite independent of everyone and everything, long before women's suffrage or the reforms in women's social status, long before the first stages of feminism.

Of course, the lives of heiresses offer neither guidance on the subject of women writers nor useful examples of women's literary careers. Madame de Staël was so incredibly rich, it would be as if the daughter of J. Paul Getty were a political philosopher! And George Sand and the young heiress who became Madame de Charrière were also un-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fettered, even if not so rich or unique as the daughter of Louis XVI's finance minister. The attempt to make them serve as exemplary failures is no more successful than the tendency among feminists to canonize them, because, like the celebrities of our own times, they stand more for their own careers than for anything beyond themselves.

Professor Brée's chief difficulty is perhaps with the historians of French literature, the official ranking of greatness, the sanction of public official acclaim which has for so long eluded women writers in France. Recent developments in the various fields of "women's studies" have done much to dissipate ignorance and fill out the blank spaces in literature as in other areas of human endeavor, and one may hope that these developments will be felt among the French as well. In a nation with an explicit "academy" there are certain inevitable difficulties, however, and women writers may not be the only ones whose history is distorted because of it. Indeed, that whole familiar rhythm of avant-garde drama, the exclusion and ridicule followed by eventual acceptance and acclaim, is so regularly played out on a French stage as to have achieved the status of a classic. The very nature of the process of acceptance and adulation may insure official literary sanction, but there may be good reason to wonder whether the women writers are in fact deprived by not achieving it so readily. The recent biography of Colette by Margaret Crosland may raise in the reader's mind a question whether the official acceptance and enshrinement in the history books is what should be wished for women writers in France. The very process, the eternal drama, may be sufficiently suspect as to make one feel that those who are left outside might be a bit freer than those who are welcomed in. It is a subject the French themselves have mused on with great feeling.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PATRICIA MEYER SPACKS

Fiction Chronicle

HEROINES. Hard times for fiction. First, three novels by men.[1] In one, the heroine remains bound and helpless through most of the action. Immediately before she's murdered, she's raped (for the second time) by a teen-age sadist. She enjoys it. (Just so you shouldn't think this is pornography, there's also some talk about good and evil while the rapes go on.) In another book, the heroine, in her eighties, wields boundless psychological power. She looks back on a life in which she has successfully manipulated everyone she knows. Her victims aren't happy, neither is she, despite her huge vitality. For one thing, she knows herself incapable of loving. Just so you shouldn't think it's soap opera, there's lots of lush writing and flashbacks.

Woman as absolutely powerful, absolutely passive: these male fantasies might repay the attention of a sociologist or psychiatrist more than that of a literary critic. Somewhere between the extremes lies Elio Vittorini's semi-mythic view of the female nature. The women of Messina provide physical and psychic energy to sustain a community created out of postwar desolation by a band of derelicts. Siracusa, most individualized of the women, distinguishes herself by announcing to her lover that he can always have her, even when she's angry. Her father seeks her in vain from one end of Italy to the other, declaring her enduring virginity. Her sexual openness somehow amounts to the same thing as her father's vision: virginity and availability both being versions of ultimate female goodness. The nineteenth-century polarity of virgin and whore has been translated into myths which register male needs ever more directly.

Four novels by women supply comparable riches for psychological speculation, if an unfortunate poverty of literary value.[2] Three are permeated by the rhetoric of "liberation," all examine what the notion of feminine freedom can mean these days. Neither complete power nor complete passivity seems a valid possibility to the heroines here, though both may represent temptations. An awareness of the shifting meanings of female sexuality—vulnerability and strength—dominates these books; and a special note of self-pity that vulnerability and strength should be perpetually in conflict. The protagonist of *Fear of Flying* yells at her psychoanalyst—one of the longer, more im-

[1] LET'S GO PLAY AT THE ADAMS', by *Mendal W. Johnson*. Crowell. $6.95. THE EYE OF THE STORM, by *Patrick White*. Viking. $8.95. WOMEN OF MESSINA, by *Elio Vittorini*. New Directions. $9.50.

[2] FEAR OF FLYING, by *Erica Jong*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. $6.95. SULA, by *Toni Morrison*. Knopf. $5.95. ADVANCING PAUL NEWMAN, by *Eleanor Bergstein*. Viking. $7.95. WAIT UNTIL EVENING, by *Henrietta Buckmaster*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $7.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

probable yells on novelistic record (I can reproduce only a bit of it)—"how can you possibly understand anything about me or the things I'm struggling with? I don't *want* to live by the things you live by. I don't *want* that kind of life and I don't see why I should be judged by its standards. . . . Why should I listen to *you* about what it means to be a woman? . . . Why shouldn't I listen to *myself* for once?" Complaints, complaints, all in the same vacuous language . . . and there's no giving her what she wants, women in recent novels don't know what they want, they just don't enjoy what they get, in any version. Life should be better—men shouldn't lust after them, or should; they must be brave, or shouldn't be victimized; they mustn't live by men's standards, or men should live by theirs; they should find perfect lovers or permanent husbands or discover how to get along without them. Endless discontent and an accompanying sense of entitlement: that's what heroines are made of.

This brief summary suggests accurately, I think, the tone of all but one of the four novels in hand, and the difference of the fourth book is instructive. *Sula,* written by and about a black woman, shares with the novels by Erica Jong and Eleanor Bergstein an attractive atmosphere of energy, but unlike the others doesn't suggest in its structure a snake biting its tail. Sula's difference from other people derives from her determination to be herself; unlike her white fictional contemporaries, she declares the responses of others irrelevant to her goal. No one, nothing, can hurt or help her; dying, she triumphantly declares her possession of her own mind, her own experience, her own loneliness. The novel's most original aspect is its treatment of the bizarre: Sula and a friend accidently drown another child, with no repercussions ever; Sula's grandmother deliberately burns her son to death (he's a drug addict who wants, she claims, to crawl back in her womb); less spectacular but equally memorable, a black woman gets off a train to urinate in the tall grass, there being no restrooms for her race. Important events occur offstage, referred to casually: Sula's grandmother arranges to get her leg cut off by a train, so that she can support her children by a pension; several years of Sula's life vaguely pass in places like New Orleans, thousands of days unnoted. Events hardly matter, the novel argues; what one makes of the self is what counts. Unfortunately, our sense of what Sula has "made" must rest finally more on assertion than on demonstration. Her arbitrary death betrays her creator's awareness that little can be done with her; her society and her own imagination limit her possibilities: a certain hollowness permeates the last third of the book.

But at least Toni Morrison will not obscure hollowness by posturing. *Advancing Paul Newman* proceeds at a frenetic pace, full of flash-backed glimpses into various consciousnesses, disjunctive movements from one character to another. Like *Sula,* the book nominally centers on the relation of two women, but no distinct sense of relationship or separate personality emerges. Kitsy envies Ila at the beginning because an outburst on a train declares the other young woman's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

capacity for emotion—Kitsy herself "never cried unless someone hit her or failed to invite her to something." Ila, as the action develops, feels terribly sorry for herself because a dog's licking her on a ski slope seems the first warm touch she's felt for months, and she feels sad because once the *New Yorker* publishes the story it has accepted from her, she'll be thought of as someone who had a single story in the *New Yorker* rather than someone of immense potential: such is her emotional life. Kitsy marries and divorces, marries once more, her husband dies in Vietnam, she wakes from a nightmare to find herself making a list of ways to commit suicide: perhaps this constitutes an emotional advance? Hard to tell. Kitsy's first husband, Jerry, like the two women, involves himself in Eugene McCarthy's presidential campaign. *His* most intense emotional experience comes from seeing the sun flashing off the pocket mirrors of thousands of women massed in a shopping center parking lot awaiting the promised arrival of Paul Newman.

Wonderful details, but a prevading emotional shallowness, a desperate atmosphere of people always in motion, between public and private events, a lack of controlling purpose. Bergstein manipulates an ironic language of cliché with skill, yet her linguistic and structural ironies seem too easy, unearned. The novel supplies no perspective, no meaningful shape even; it renders rather than imitates action.

Reading such books fills me with old-fashioned longings: for art as criticism of life, for writing which offers more than self-indulgence or pretentiousness, for authors who suggest attitudes more meaningful than self-pity and self-display. *Fear of Flying* is particularly irritating. We are invited to admire its heroine not only because she suffers and yells at her analyst but because she has elaborate fantasies of extramarital sex, runs off with a dirty Laingian psychoanalyst, abandoning her husband, a clean Freudian analyst, and the Laingian turns out not a free spirit after all, so she goes back—after a brief and unconvincing bout of psychic anguish—and . . . takes a bath. At every point, she invites unqualified congratulation. To be sure, she does so with considerable verve—the book moves with speed and a brash, sometimes successfully comic, style ("What could be more poignant than a liberated woman eye to eye with a limp prick?"). But it makes, at the same time, serious claims for itself: "If you were female and talented, life was a trap no matter which way you turned." The sensibility of its first-person narrator, undeniably female, seems too crude to justify any profound concern with her plight. Claiming to be victimized by the world, by men, she demonstrates considerable capacity to manipulate events for her own immediate gratification, if not her ultimate advantage; and the novel seems desperately misguided in accepting her assessment of her "interesting" self and her uncooperative environment.

Wait Until Evening, less misguided, but boring, offers as its version of woman-as-victim a middle-aged mother, amnesiac after an automobile accident, developing a relationship with the man who takes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her in. People whisper and gasp and cry a good deal in this novel, and they remember a lot, and look into themselves. Catherine, looking and remembering, recaptures a past involving an apolitical husband and an overly political son, member of a radical group making bombs. Her rescuer has a crazy wife and a son himself, but he resolves her problem (principally formulated as lack of courage)—she ends by asserting that she's never received as much love as she has from him. Love, after all, emerges as the real concern of these novels about, and by, women. Their heroines can't find enough or give enough, and they can't quite admit that love, after all, is what they want. Indeed, Sula, the most interesting of them, achieves a sense of personal success specifically by repressing and largely denying her emotional needs. But the atmosphere of grievance common to the genteel self-searchings of *Wait Until Evening* and the frantic disjunctiveness of *Advancing Paul Newman* apparently derives from the conviction that heroines these days can neither give nor receive adequate emotional gratification through relationship.

The books by men about women focus on relationship as structure rather than on problems of feeling for their own sake. *Let's Go Play at the Adams'* doesn't merit serious discussion, a book written clearly with an eye to the movies or a sick comic strip—the crowd that goes for *Slaves in the Dorm* will love this one, rich in sordid detail. Vittorini and White, on the other hand, make claims. You have to take White seriously, he won the Nobel Prize—otherwise, one might conclude that he's merely pretentious. "The worst thing about love between human beings," Elizabeth Hunter announces from her bed, with the perspective of extreme old age, "when you're prepared to love them they don't want it; when they do, it's you who can't bear the idea." Emotional cross-purposes confuse all relationships in this book, but the novel's devious modes of narrative lift confusion to an artistic principle. Moving from one consciousness to another, White offers the viewpoint of the old woman herself, implicitly or explicitly the center of others' lives, and the perspective also of her daughter, her son, her lawyer (a one-time lover), her nurses and housekeeper. Their divergent problems, sexual, social, psychological, duplicate one another inasmuch as all reflect failures of intimacy. Only one woman, a nurse, understands her own dilemma as deriving from the impossibility of understanding between the sexes, and that only because of her emotional shallowness; other characters realize that sexual problems do not alone account for human suffering. The desire to manipulate and control crosses sexual lines, and the difficulty of achieving closeness exists for those relating to their own sex as well as the other. Elizabeth's daughter, disastrously married, believes her mother responsible for her lack of happiness; her son, full of vague ambitions and pretensions as an actor, thinks for a time that her money may solve his problems, but he reveals emotional deficiencies which make money irrelevant. Elizabeth, destroyer of other lives, asserts her final power in a deliberate choice of death's solitude,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

confirming the essential solitude in which she has all along existed.

But a novel must live in characters and action, not by claims of profundity or an intricate surface of language. *The Eye of the Storm* does not live. The nurse who worries about male persecution goes to bed with Elizabeth's actor-son. (So, almost incidentally, does his sister.) Plausible, perhaps—White works hard to make it so—yet not derived from any necessity of character. The old family solicitor steals Elizabeth's valuable ring: not even plausible, merely convenient. Such happenings reverberate, no difficulty grasping their *meaning*, but meaning can't substitute for psychology. *The Eye of the Storm* overpowers the reader with hurricanes and lesbians and horrible parties, all rich in symbolic significance. Its characters, from the grand old lady, her face grotesquely painted for company, dying while sitting on her commode, to her refugee housekeeper (her family dead in concentration camps, she enjoys dressing in male costume to do music hall dances), display the author's invention rather than his knowledge of human nature.

The imaginative overtones of minor events shape *Women of Messina,* a novel of which one might say with equal truth that nothing important happens in it or that it concerns itself only with the important. The book reports the rebuilding and the inner decay of a nation by explaining how a village acquires a mule and cart and finally a functional truck. "What is it men need when things go wrong? They need a sense of community." The sense of community, as it develops and deteriorates, provides emotional focus, and Vittorini embodies this idea in images and characters possessing the vitality of poetry. Rarely does he enter for long the consciousness of a character; usually he remains at a distance, reporting what might be deduced from the village register, disclaiming traditional authorial knowledge. *Women of Messina* provides little plot, in the ordinary meaning, and skimpy characterization. Yet it involves the reader richly in an enormous action, making one feel and see the tumult of a country struggling back after war: the confusion and exhilaration of masses traveling aimlessly to assert their power to travel; the excitement of imagining city life, for those not in it, and the excitement of planting grain, and of clearing land mines; the awareness of possibility in a country denuded of all that makes ordinary life plausible. The women of Messina, exemplifying endurance, create the community men need through their sheer determination to survive. Survival is the novel's action—survival through community and work; and the book's ironic ending reveals how the need to survive converts itself to moral flaccidity as survival becomes easy. Elegantly written, even in translation, powerfully imagined, impelled by the force of conviction, the book violates normal expectations of the novel to demonstrate that characterization need not depend on individuation. The women achieve heroic stature through what they do, we feel little need to know who they are. The artist's control creates novelistic shape through contemplation of large events in their petty aspects.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Vittorini published *Women of Messina* almost a quarter of a century ago; its revised version (this version) appeared ten years ago in Italy. Its sense of the possibility of containing and commenting on national phenomena of grand significance would be harder to come by today. Not that it is "dated," in attitude or technique; its complex awareness of human corruption seems particularly up-to-date. But the kind of ambitiousness Vittorini here exemplifies has yielded now, on the whole, to the kind White represents: grandiose statement, grandiose technique, diminished imaginative substance. The novel begins to contain, *tries* to contain, less and less.

Our sociologist would notice that the women in these novels, with the exception of Mendal Johnson's young lady who exists only as an object of sadism, are marked by their abounding energy, destructive though it may be of others and of themselves; the men, on the whole, have less. The sociologist might also remark that the four novels by women all display a vivid, exact awareness of specific social setting. They issue from and reflect distinct worlds, understood as relevant to the lives of individuals inhabiting them. The McCarthy campaign, the huddles of radical youth, the trans-Atlantic airplane, the international conference of intellectuals, the poor southern town, changing with the economy—these provide not only novelistic backdrops but foregrounds, arenas for action. The male novelists reviewed, on the other hand, members of the sex which traditionally reports the world's reality, seem relatively uninterested in social setting or life style. Even Vittorini, with his vivid awareness of a specific social situation, systematically universalizes, mythologizes, distances, to emphasize the essential timelessness of his story and his characters. *Let's Go Play at the Adams'* makes ritualistic gestures about modern youth, contains television sets and tranquilizers, but provides no real world at all. A blurb on the dust jacket of *The Eye of the Storm* asserts—as a merit—that the book evokes little that's purely Australian; its events might take place almost anywhere, any time.

HEROES. A middle-aged social worker in Budapest. A thirty-year-old university lecturer in London. The fat, aging owner of a roadside café. An ancient Kentucky farmer. . . . The hero appears to be changing shape.[3] Nor are these mere antiheroes in disguise: each openly claims admiration, or his creator claims—and usually wins—admiration for him. These men are not aggressive; often they seem strikingly passive. If they possess some of the energy of their female counterparts, it displays itself in quiet ways, never through the frenetic activity or effort at activity that marks the strivings of fictional women of the moment to control their destinies, achieve

[3] THE CASE WORKER, by *George Konrád*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $6.95. PASMORE, by *David Storey*. Dutton. $6.50. NICKEL MOUNTAIN, by *John Gardner*. Knopf. $6.95. THE MEMORY OF OLD JACK, by *Wendell Berry*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $6.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their freedom. Women in novels claim heroic status for their dissatisfaction; men, it seems, claim it for their *goodness*—that traditional female burden and prerogative. The hero of *Nickel Mountain* is, rather too insistently, a Christ figure. The hero of *The Case Worker* devotes his professional life to helping others and his private fantasies to enlarging that help, though he well perceives its cost and its futility. Old Jack, in Wendell Berry's novel, contemplates a lifelong experience of helping, both as actor and recipient. Even Pasmore, hero of the least interesting, most self-indulgent, of these books, explains his own dissatisfaction and alienation as resulting from the incongruity between his own virtue and the world he inhabits: "Where had all this faith and goodness got him?"

Pasmore inhabits a novel written with surpassing lack of skill—alternating between long stretches of flat "he said, she said" narrative and pretentious, confusing explanatory sequences—in which nothing important happens from any point of view. The hero becomes discontent, moves out of his home, conducts a love affair which ends when his mistress's husband has him beaten up, becomes more discouraged, visits his parents, decides to return to his wife, feels better. His wife, meanwhile, after initial confusion and distress, takes a lover, assumes command of her own life, and appears to flourish. But she unaccountably welcomes her husband back when he wishes to come. We are invited to take this insignificant man as a meaningful figure because he has the courage of his feelings. Recognizing the irrationality of his own responses, he also recognizes that they're all he has; he will live by his inner barometer. The rest of humanity disappears from his consciousness. In a particularly successful encounter with his mistress, "She vanished before him. In the end he was astonished to find that he was not alone." But neither he nor, apparently, his inventor perceives his solipsism as a moral flaw. The novel rests on a curious amalgam of moral assertion—that Pasmore is a good and faithful husband, father, worker, for example—and moral vacuity. In its bland assumption that novels can claim attention without action, character, morality, or compelling language—the absence of these things, in fact, declaring authenticity—the book seems a very contemporary phenomenon indeed.

Pasmore is depressing not because it concerns a depressed man but because it contains so little and demands such disproportionate response. *The Case Worker* dampens the spirit because it insists on doing so. Yet the terrific energy of George Konrád's writing, the fierce indignation which underlies his every description, to some extent counteracts the dismalness of the life he evokes. This novel is depressing as a work of art focused on grim experience, not as a denial of the possibilities of art.

The narrator, a government employee responsible for the welfare of many of society's victims, lives as a constant witness of human horror; his many catalogues of unbelievable degradation and need largely shape the book's action, defining the hero's perceptions and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forcing the reader to share his progress toward identification with an idiot child. For a time he assumes, or fantasizes assuming, full physical, emotional, and moral responsibility for the hopeless, untrainable boy whose parents have committed suicide. To devote his life to the child would mean relinquishing all power: "I would wipe the enigmatic expression of omniscient official superiority off my face, . . . I would stop reprimanding people for weaknesses that I myself share." It might also mean relinquishing pain. The caretaker tries to duplicate the equanimity of his charge, free from the dreadful burdens of language, memory, and meaning. The mind's capacity to order experience demands its awareness of the intolerable; the case worker lives with the intolerable, and with the knowledge of the state's complicity in creating it. The episodes he reports ring like horrid parables of our time. Yet the horror he sees is truly there; to reconcile himself to it is the one grotesquerie he avoids. He achieves, without compromise, a kind of acceptance, recognizing the capacity for human feeling which survives in unspeakable conditions, recognizing the beauty that exists even in an inhumane society, dealing with his own unbearable condition not by blunting but by refining his sensibilities: to look at what surrounds him, to come to terms with it, and to survive in compassion, continuing to listen and to see.

John Gardner's version of pastoral asserts a more programmatic vision of the hero as saint. Henry Soames, enormously fat, victim of a weak heart which may kill him at any moment, lacks the case worker's opportunities for confronting the world's evils. His society comprises those few who straggle in to his café on the side of a mountain; he knows of the larger world only through newspapers and through his imaginings. Yet he inhabits a microcosm. Grandly he confronts the evils that present themselves, marrying the helpless girl made pregnant by another man, sheltering the religious fanatic whose wife has died in a mysterious fire. We are left in no doubt about how we are to judge him: " 'That's what a man has to have,' " he pronounces. " 'I mean it. Crucifixion.' . . . He was a fat, blubbering Holy Jesus, or anyway one half of him was, loving hell out of truckers and drunks and Willards and Callies—ready to be nailed for them. Eager. More heart than he knew how to spend." A lover of mankind although he values his solitude, Henry does good to others while continuing to eat himself to death. He has few resources of self-defense, but needs few. Gardner's insistent depiction of his commonplace life demands that he be taken seriously: heroes no longer inhabit high places (though Henry, of course, hardly accidentally, lives on a mountain).

But the experience of reading *Nickel Mountain* is less compelling than it should be, because Henry and his friends exist too clearly for the convenience and at the disposal of the author who has created them. One might say approximately the same of all the other novels I have mentioned, with the possible exception of Vittorini's. The author's purposes in writing seem too vividly present—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to make money, win a prize; or to convey a message; or to pass the time. Nothing wrong with any of these intents—for such reasons people long have written novels. But people *reading* novels have not always had to be so sharply aware that women's lib and Christ figures and social consciousness are selling this season. Henry Soames and his pathetic wife never take over the action of *Nickel Mountain.* The protagonist of *The Case Worker* is a spokesman for the author's indignation; the hero of *Nickel Mountain* is an object for the author's ingenuity. Two kinds of didacticism, perhaps: the novel as protest, the novel as manipulation. When Henry reflects on the fact that his wife has taken over and restructured his experience, he concludes, "he knew beyond any shadow of doubt that the new life she had shaped was his own, it fit him the way his father's old coat had one day, to his surprise, fit him, and from that moment on he didn't just wear the new life, he owned it." But the "new life"—the café remodeled, elaborated, the shabby made bourgeois—"fits" only by the author's insistence; he demonstrates that the character can be reshaped at his convenience. *The Case Worker* teaches that fiction can reflect painful reality; *Nickel Mountain* separates author and reader from reality, supplying characters who provide interesting objects of contemplation but not of belief.

Both extremes—novels in which the characters directly articulate the author's beliefs or sensibility (*Fear of Flying*? *Pasmore*?) and those in which the characters display the author's inventiveness rather than his perception (*Eye of the Storm, Advancing Paul Newman*)—often share an atmosphere as of literary exercise. They may nonetheless raise significant issues: it seems meaningful, for example, that the antihero has virtually disappeared. Ineptitude can form part of the hero's equipment, the possibility of meaningful achievement remains dim, but novelists now try to imagine figures whose efforts and successes and even failures delineate them as persons of stature. Wendell Berry has created such a person without making him part of a mere exercise. Old Jack, a noble anachronism (and fully understood as such by the book he inhabits), accomplishes, like the other heroes, nothing of significance—except that he survives to his nineties. But neither he nor the author makes any great point of this. Otherwise, he cares for his farm. For a time he enlarges it, but his venture at expansion fails. He marries for love, but his marriage proves unsatisfying. He finds a mistress, she burns to death in an accidental fire. His only daughter feels no interest in him, his son-in-law condescends to him, he spends his last years in a hotel boarding house whose proprietor finds him a perplexing nuisance. Yet his life is not merely said to be a triumph, it *feels* like a triumph; so does the novel.

The "memory" referred to in the title comprises both Old Jack's recapturing of his past and the traces of him existing in the minds of others. Part of Jack's triumph consists in this double memory. His way of containing his own history includes judgment as well as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sentiment. He does not consider himself a hero, he would not think in such terms. But he has, his experience has made him have, a vital set of values, more specific than Henry Soames's love of mankind, painfully and lengthily earned. By comparison with *The Memory of Old Jack, Nickel Mountain* seems false pastoral: to perch on the side of a mountain, far from the city where men and women, faceless and corrupt, watch murders in silence—this encourages virtue, Gardner suggests. It's too romantic. To work the fields, in Wendell Berry's vision, may foster virtue or vice: it certainly places the worker at the center of involvement. The shiftless here do not inevitably lose the battles of life; they can endure, tinkering with their automobiles, exhausting their land, long after a good man has been driven away. Yet the land makes demands, if a man is attuned to them, and Jack's stature results partly from his full acceptance of those obligations. "What has always remained is the earth, promising the return of what has been taken from it. What has remained is the good darkness out of which all things come, even the light, and to which they all go back again. Too little respect is paid to that now, he thinks, but he has respected it." The earth has provided his metaphysics, fostered "the intricacy of power and skill that made his manhood," created his power to endure, sustained him within "the yeoman's tradition of sufficiency to himself, of faithfulness to his place." His memory reminds him of all this, and of how it has been achieved. And the memory of Jack's life as it exists for others sustains them as the earth has sustained him, asserting the network of past and present in which all live, recalling the possibilities of dignity and self-sufficiency but also of complex fellowship, in which always enough, never too much, help is given.

The novel brings such abstractions to life, converting "values" to real possessions. It recognizes Jack's emotional and intellectual limitations and their cost and assesses the meaning such a man can have in such a time as ours. Jack was born in 1860. The young man going off to college at the end of the book, in the early 50's, will face a more complicated struggle for vocation than Jack could readily imagine—he must reconcile new possibilities of knowledge with old systems of value. But he does not for that reason declare the old values irrelevant: that would be a form of sentimentality. This novel seems remarkably *un*programmatic, its values emerging from the lives of its characters rather than the pronouncements of its author. It recognizes that economic facts make lives like Jack's increasingly unlikely, while seeing also that the memory of Old Jack offers sustaining force in a world different from any the old man could dream of, or perhaps endure.

ACTIONS. The significant action of many current novels—as the examples thus far may suggest—takes place in the imagination, the memory, the sensibility of the protagonists. For many novelists the outer world seems hardly real, or too dangerous to think about, although almost every work of fiction I've read recently provides at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

least one catalogue of objects, apparently to demonstrate that the writer can, if he will, notice what's going on outside his head. For others (*The Case Worker*, for instance) the objective world is real but too dreadful to be inhabited without the mediation of the interpretive imagination. Wendell Berry alone among these writers depicts a world which nourishes rather than deforms the mind. The imagination provides for many novelists a precarious way to declare an independence felt as a bitter necessity.[4]

Jaws, from this point of view, becomes something of an anomaly: an old-fashioned tale of man against nature, the antagonist a man-eating shark—unquestionably the best character in the book. But Benchley's efforts to shape a narrative around that shark reveal the difficulties of telling an adventure tale in our time.

We start with a version of *Enemy of the People*: shark kills midnight swimmer, town faces dilemma of whether to publicize the event at the risk of scaring tourists away. The answer nowadays, of course, is no—at no cost should tourists be scared—and the police chief who urges paramount concern with human life folds under brief pressure; the beaches remain open. When the shark claims two more victims, the possibility of avoiding publicity disappears; so does the moral problem, now converted to the practical difficulty of killing the shark. Benchley moves uneasily between the external situation with the fish, which he depicts splendidly, and various contrived and unconvincing psychological and sexual difficulties. Finally he glimpses a way out, a means to combine psychology and action: a little touch of *Moby Dick*. The mercenary fisherman who's been hired to get the shark suddenly and implausibly becomes obsessed, we have a rousing good chase, the shark kills the fisherman and another bad guy but gets his comeuppance in the end, the police chief alone surviving the pursuit. Impossible to believe in the obsession, but you have faith in the chase. Yet a chase is no longer thought to be enough, the novelist uneasily proclaims its significance by connecting it in contrived ways with the psyche, oddly ignoring the real and profound psychic meanings inherent in the fable of pursuit to the death.

Francine Prose, in *The Glorious Ones*, makes her novelistic subject the novelist's difficulty of determining the proper balance between internal and external life. Her characters, who tell versions of a single story from varying points of view, belong to a troupe of traveling players in seventeenth-century Italy. Ms. Prose avoids the dreariness of the historical novel, making little attempt at external verisimilitude—the book contains no visual world, few objects, only the sketchiest reference to large happenings—and writing as directly and naively as if she were reporting events in a college dormitory. She tells of the impossibility of separating truth from fiction. The parts actors take on the stage and in real life merge, they don't know when

[4] JAWS, by *Peter Benchley*. Doubleday. $6.95. THE GLORIOUS ONES, by *Francine Prose*. Atheneum. $6.95. FATHERING, by *Nicholas Delbanco*. Morrow. $7.95. EMBARKATION, by *J. R. Salamanca*. Knopf. $6.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they're acting. Initially, it seems that their director has an inspired eye for physiognomy, for finding faces and bodies appropriate to the roles he needs to fill. But it may be, rather, that the roles shape the men and women playing them. Their ambiguous situation penalizes them through their gradual separation from reality. The leading actress dies after a dream reveals to her the troupe's antagonism to her pregnancy, childbirth being too real for them. Their separation from the real also involves danger for spectators: "We made them believe that we loved them; at the very same time, we made them think our love was all in their minds, a fantasy of their own creation. . . . It wasn't our fault. For the truth of the matter was that *we* never knew what we really felt, and what was just in our imaginations." The slippery antithesis between *really* and *just* epitomizes the tensions of which the novel is made, beginning with the opening allusion to Dante, whose vision of hell existed "just" in his imagination. Reflecting back on that allusion, one understands more than any of the narrators realizes. Perhaps, in fact, one can "really feel" *only* what exists "just in the imagination," imagination being the single valid source of emotion. At any rate, *The Glorious Ones* provokes such speculation. Yet it's a book more satisfying to think about then to read: the actual narrative suffers from thinness, flimsiness of verbal texture; it's a one-gimmick book; you get bored with the gimmick; the different points of view don't tell enough.

The same discrepancy between grand theme and limited accomplishment mars *Fathering* and *Embarkation*, both novels concerned with the painful intricacies of parent-child relationship, both concerned particularly—although they don't put it that way—with the connections between imagination and love. Nicholas Delbanco creates a marvelous context for investigating this connection by constructing the situation of a boy whose literal father may be either the man who brought him up or that man's father, father and son having shared a mistress whose pregnancy might have derived from either. The multiple uncertainties of this arrangement shadow succeeding generations and add special difficulties to the young man's classic quest to discover his identity. He does so, in a manner of speaking—and a fairly shabby identity it turns out to be—by going to bed with his mother. That is, his putative stepmother, wife of the man who may be either his father or his half-brother—you see how it goes.

But my account misleadingly emphasizes confusing events. In fact, what happens in this novel seems fairly arbitrary: not intentionally or pointedly so, but arbitrary because the author doesn't quite care, his interest lies elsewhere. A touch of incest jazzes up the narrative as, on a verbal level, do the tall tales told for no apparent reason by Robert's friend Jake, who, also for no apparent reason beyond sensationalism, gets himself murdered in particularly revolting fashion in Savannah, Georgia. The dust jacket tells us that this book deals with the lives of families and nations as well as individuals. More precisely, it deals with imaginations—the rich variety contained in Robert's head and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his grandfather (or father) Hans's and Hans's wife and Jake's and on and on. People think and dream and remember, therefore they exist. Nicholas Delbanco writes like an inspired maniac, with a brilliant outpouring of image and idea; perhaps, therefore, *he* exists. His novel, however, lacks coherence of action, apparently unable to resolve its uneasy balance between internal and external reality. If Robert only fantasized sleeping with his proxy mother, the imaginary event would assume its proper place in a long series of mental extravagances. As a real event, it makes demands which the narrative can't fulfill, for the book evades any real examination of its consequences. Nor does this incest in the first place derive from any clear necessity of character or event: though it expresses the deepest laws of human nature, no one seems aware of that fact. The author, brilliantly alive to the chaos of the inner life, is unable to relate the psyche to what happens externally, and seems unaware of the lack of relationship. *Fathering* doesn't know what it's doing—doing many things well, never shaping them into a whole.

I'd like to end on a ringing note of affirmation, to declare that *Embarkation,* say, solves the problems almost all these other novels exemplify. It does solve some, with its powerful image of the father-artist: one of the few forceful, self-seeking, energetic males around, in this era of the hero-as-helper. Joel Linthicum, builder of boats, already dead as the novel opens, survives, bigger than life, in the imaginations of his children, imaginations long since shaped and marred by him, the image of his effect always before us in the presence of the brain-damaged twenty-five-year-old Jamed. Joel is no hero, or a dreadfully ambiguous one. The novelist can imagine him, but cannot keep him going. Joel builds beautiful boats, sacrificing all human ties for their sake; he burns down the family home for insurance money to finance them. He drinks Scotch, fornicates, shouts Shakespeare. He dies. His wife has long since gone dead within, his idiot child still plays with sand. The brilliant daughter and actor-son find it impossible to achieve fulfillment. The son, Aaron, sees himself as a helper, a lover of the maimed and unsuccessful; the daughter cannot completely leave home.

Accurate characterization, powerful writing, ingenious invention—but no driving novelistic action: half an action, perhaps. Despite the great vitality of the central character, the novel lacks vitality of conception—the kind one feels in *The Memory of Old Jack,* where character and action issue from firm conviction. Similar lacks mar virtually all these books. Their forceful heroines and noble heroes act or are acted upon in arbitrary ways, mostly they talk and think, are talked and thought about. Nothing *must* happen. The son doesn't have to sleep with his mother; when he does, it's unnerving to find onself wondering, "So what?". Joel Linthicum is compelled to his destruction, but his children's lives come to nothing in particular. Inconclusiveness, of course, is an up-to-date effect. But one may regret that it apparently has to generate so much inconclusive work.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GUY DAVENPORT

The Man without Contemporaries

> It cannot be said that it was all smooth and unruffled sailing in this huge, new socialist experiment undertaken by the first workers' and peasants' state in the world. There is a page in the biography of the Soviet Union which is generally referred to as the period of the cult of personality. It is bound up with the name of Joseph Stalin.[1]
>
> —Albert P. Nenarokov, *Russia in the Twentieth Century*

Osip Emilievich Mandelstam, a poet as obliquely allusive as Mallarme, as honed, chiselled, and compact as Zukofsky, and such a master of form and imagery that he may well be the greatest Russian poet of our time, spent the last fifteen years of his life—from age thirty-two—banned, starving, homeless, and at times insane with desperation. In 1938 he was sentenced to a labor camp in Siberia, where he died after a few months. His brother was notified of his death three years later.

His widow, Nadezhda Yakovlevna, shared Mandelstam's persecutions while he was alive, survived what might have been a similar persecution except for luckier breaks and the death of Stalin, lived for years in the corner of someone else's kitchen, and now lives in a room of her own. She has no assurance that she will not be expelled from the country, and wrote both volumes of her memoirs expecting the knock of the police on the door.

Mandelstam's very existence has been a secret for which time itself through a complex gear of destinies evolved the disclosure. His wife says that she would not have twice braved the risk of *samizdat* (post-Gutenberg distribution of manuscripts in carbon copies) and publication in the West if the invisible and unapproachable commissars of Litkontrol had published her husband's poetry. (She could scarcely have guessed that among more Kafkaesque reasons for biding their time they were also waiting for the copyright to run out: why pay royalty checks to an old woman whose husband insulted Stalin and slapped the face of Comrade Alexei Tolstoi?)

While Mrs. Mandelstam was writing her 1100 pages of memoirs

[1] Except for the added sentiment that Stalin's "distortions, for all their gravity, did not alter the nature of socialist society, nor did they shake the pillars of socialism," this is the sole reference in a Soviet history book to the thirty-year Terror.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

without a title (the English titles, punning on her name, which means "hope," were furnished by the publisher), Professor Clarence Brown, of Princeton, was finishing a twenty-year study of the poet. In 1955 there began to appear, in Russian, a New York edition of Mandelstam's poetry, collected and edited by two exiled scholars, Gleb Struve and Boris Filippov. This now runs to three volumes.

Our first substantial knowledge of Mandelstam's writing was Clarence Brown's translation of three prose pieces (*The Noise of Time, Theodosia, The Egyptian Stamp*)[2]—three delightful, lapidary, bright narratives. They seem to have been achieved by applying the severest rules of Imagism to the art of the novel. Mandelstam's economy with words was Spartan. He envied the mediaeval philosophers their clarity and precision. Fragmentary and capricious as his prose seems, it has a sense of wholeness.

A page of Mandelstam's prose is a kind of algebra of ironies over which the same hand has drawn comic furniture and objects with a life of their own, à la Chagall. *The Noise of Time* is a spiritual inventory of the mode of life swept away by the Revolution—men condemned to stations on the moon might write such books about life on the earth: a book that would teach us that the usual and the routine look like miracles once you have lost them forever.

Mandelstam wrote anywhere and everywhere. We can scarcely begin to realize his world in which the pencil stub and the three pieces of paper you have is all the pencil and all the paper you are ever going to have. He composed in his head, dictated to his wife, or wrote on a chair seat while kneeling. Some poems (like the offending Stalin lyric) were not written down at all.

After Mandelstam's death his wife memorized everything for which she had a text, prose and poetry together. She was in Voronezh. The tanks of the Wehrmacht were threatening from one direction, the NKVD from another.

Such persecution would be understandable up to a point if Mandelstam had been a man of power, like Trotsky, or an open opponent of the Bolsheviks. On the contrary, he was an all but invisible lyric poet. In the stupidity of the official minds that ordered his harassment and eventually his sentence to Siberia there must have been some dim notion that he was an aesthete, an idealistic Jew who had suspiciously converted to Christianity, a man who considered Marx and Lenin so much hot air, a poet who wasn't ever going to write paraphrases of the *Internatsionál* or an Ode to Stalin.

Nothing is so helpless as the liberal spirit face to face with fundamentalism. Such brute power can only be met with an equal and opposite moral strength, like that of the Jehovah's Witnesses who prayed for the souls of the machinegunners before whom they fell at Buchenwald, the singing Christians Nero nailed to crosses in the Circus, or

[2] *The Prose of Osip Mandelstam* (Princeton University, 1965).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mandelstam's colleague the poet Gumilyov who crumbled under the volleys of a Soviet firing squad clutching a Bible and a Homer to his heart.

Nadezhda Mandelstam's second volume of memoirs[3] is, like the first, designed as a Formalist novel, its components arranged according to a sense of kinship amongst its subjects rather than according to chronology. The Formalists (their art has been outlawed as un-Soviet since 1932) took Sterne for their model—they saw *Tristram Shandy* as something like a Cubist novel, and they were excited by the idea of a narrative the architecture of which was more prominent than the conventional unfolding of a plot. (They were also influenced by the man they call O. Genry.) The Formalist matrix gives Mrs. Mandelstam the flexibility to move backward and forward along a plot line which we can reconstruct in our imagination.

In the first volume of the memoirs (opening in typical Formalist fashion with Mandelstam slapping Alexei Tolstoi's face, the explanation of which is many pages away) Mrs. Mandelstam records the last four terrifying years of Osip's life. In digressions she posits enough of his biography to give us a full sense of his life. In this second volume she presents a sustained digression (621 pages) to the first volume.

For all the seeming despair of the title (not hers, anyway), the spirit behind every sentence is indomitable. Terror and grief made *Hope Against Hope* one of the most chilling accounts of Soviet authoritarianism (a book to authenticate Solzhenitsyn's *First Circle* and to supplement Elizaveta Almadingen's terrifying *Tomorrow Will Come*). Now there is time, in this second volume, to meditate, to sift, to fill in details.

Mrs. Mandelstam's tone can range from that of Christian stoic—forgiving and devastating with the same fell epithet—to a Brechtian trooper who can call a man a son of a bitch and make the phrase have the hiss of a tiger whose eyes have just turned to fire and whose claws have all unsheathed at once. The hope she has abandoned is for any justice or sense in the miserable régime under which she has suffered for over half a century. Her contempt has become eloquent, and she is capable of cackling with a kind of tragic gaiety at the obscenities she has had to abide.

She was dismissed, for instance, from the only solid teaching position she had after her husband's death. This was at a school remote in the provinces where she was hailed at night to a kangaroo court (People's Court, they call it) and charged with making allusions about the rising young (viz., that in the English language the young infinitive is replacing the old gerund), with teaching a nonexistent (i.e., forbidden) law of sound changes (that of Grimm), and with sitting on a window ledge (*kulturny* Communist ladies sit demurely in chairs).

She has written a book of multiple purposes: a book that comments

[3] HOPE ABANDONED, by *Nadezhda Mandelstam*. Translated from the Russian by *Max Hayward*. Atheneum. $13.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on Mandelstam's poems; that preserves his ideas, his complex personality, and *obiter dicta;* that surrounds the poet with his people—fellow Acmeists, notably Gumilyov and Anna Akhmatova, Khlebnikov, Ehrenburg, Gorodetski, a whole generation of Russian intellectuals and artists—; that expounds her wonderfully wise and individual philosophy, part Christian, part pragmatic; that condemns the whole Soviet rigamarole and all its cruel absurdity.

This great document of the human condition is in essence, under all the details, the Leskovian wit, the Dostoyevskian passion, the Brechtian cheek, an extended statement by a modern Antigone. It rings with Antigone's moral authority, and it has Antigone's sense of a freedom to speak no matter what the consequences.

Professor Brown was telling me recently that while he was having tea with the Siniavskis this spring in Paris, the phone rang. It was Nadezhda calling from Moscow. Obviously the KGB were listening. But what in the world could they add to their file of either that wasn't already there in great measure? They were listening to the widow of Mandelstam and a political prisoner in perpetual exile. Did they realize that they were listening to two victims of their tyranny from whom tyranny had taken all that it can, leaving them free to say what they pleased?

Clarence Brown's combined biography and study of Mandelstam[4] involved several journeys to the Soviet Union and to people who knew Mandelstam. The research was peculiarly difficult for obvious reasons. There were also myths to elude, especially that of a Mandelstam diminished to an elfin sprite remembered for his bird-like gestures and fin-de-siècle poses. The same thing happened to Shelley, a six-foot robust man who was mythologized into a frail wind spirit delicate as a lily.

The Mandelstam who emerges in Prof. Brown's biography is a complex figure, a poet of genius, a man of great integrity. He becomes tragic because of the historical context in which he lived on the edge of being. The violence of the times demanded patience and heroism from him at immense cost to his poetry. The wonder is that he wrote anything at all after *Stone,* his first book of poems.

He seems to have developed a useful stoicism ("Who says that we were meant to be happy?") and the art of living nowhere and with no resources. The number of bone-wracking train journeys he had to make is appalling. It is no comfort to realize that the events of his life can be paralleled with wearying repetition from Dostoyevsky to Solzhenitsyn; nightmares get worse as they persist.

The engaging difference of Prof. Brown's biography from the usual way of reconstructing a life from conflicting and obscure evidence is that he irons nothing out and indicates all the problems and blank spaces. He refrains from sentiment and guesswork, frequently showing us the processes of research (interviews, visits to Mandelstam's school

[4] MANDELSTAM, by *Clarence Brown.* Cambridge University Press. $13.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and places of exile) in lieu of suppositions and sleight-of-hand narrative. Unpublished documents are for the most part given in full, and the discussions of the Acmeist School are rigorous and lucid.

Prof. Brown shows how Acmeism (which can be defined roughly as the poetry of Mandelstam, Gumilyov, and Akhmatova) is curiously like Imagism as Pound and Hulme preached it. Both movements were a return to finely perceived realities ("to the world," Mandelstam said) after rich, and richly vague, Symbolist movements degenerating into a rhetoric of mysticism and an aesthetic of bogus philosophy and private vocabularies.

Mandelstam is not quite like any other poet, so that analogies run into instant trouble. My feeling that there is a great deal of Rimbaud in him is apparently wrong, as neither Prof. Brown nor Mrs. Mandelstam mention him. By Rimbaud I mean the gnarled image which suggests a chord of meanings rather than simple metaphor or simile, a respect for classical form together with a bold originality, a hardness of poetic phrasing that defies translation into prose.

Mandelstam's "contemporaries" (he said that he had none in the literal sense) were Ovid, Villon, Dante, Racine, Poe. He was also aware that he was an Orpheus trying to reclaim a lost spirit: in the poems of the late 1920's Persephone becomes an eloquent symbol. It is as if Mandelstam saw how prophetically he had named his first book—*Stone*. His St. Petersburg was etymologically "the city of stone." The art of living in cities (which is what "civilization" means) begins with the shaping of stone, and civilization became for Mandelstam a metaphysical nostalgia. Civilization figures in his mind as the opposite of Socialism. Stone takes on an added ambiguity: Russia has become stone, Hades, an underworld, a prison for the spirit. The beautiful and mysterious poem "Solominka" is full of women who returned from the dead: Lenores and Séraphitas.

A Mandelstam poem lives inside itself. As in Keats, Mallarmé, or Shakespeare, the words breed meaning. Again and again Prof. Brown makes anguished statements about the impossibility of translating Mandelstam into English. In order to make the attempt he turned to the poet W. S. Merwin (who knows bushels of languages but not Russian) and entered into one of the happier collaborations of literary history.[5]

In Prof. Brown's *Mandelstam* we find this literal translation:

> ringing little straw, dry Solominka,
> you have drunk up all of death and become tenderer

Merwin turns this into:

> dry Solominka, little ringing straw
> who sipped up the whole of death—it has made you gentle.

[5] SELECTED POEMS, by *Osip Mandelstam*. Translated by *Clarence Brown and W. S. Merwin*. Atheneum. $6.25.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Note how Merwin moves *ing* and *ink* in from the extremes of the line, and cancels the possibility of *unk* clinking against *ink*. I suppose it is Mandelstamian for "straw" to suggest "sip.")

> We cannot bear strained silence—
> The faultiness of souls is offensive, after all!
> The reader had been confused when he first appeared
> And was gleefully greeted with cries of "Please!"
> I knew it, I knew who was invisibly there:
> A man out of a nightmare was reading "Ulalume."
> Meaning is mere vanity and the word is only noise
> While phonetics is the seraph's handmaiden.
> Edgar's harp would sing of the House of Usher,
> The madman drank some water, blinked and said no more.
> I was on the street. The silk of autumn whistled
> And the silk of a tickling scarf warmed my throat.

That's Prof. Brown's trot, intended for information only. Here's the Brown and Merwin version:

> He can't speak, and we can't bear it!
> It's like watching a mutilation of the soul.
> A reciter stood on the stage, wild-eyed,
> And they went mad, shouting "Please, please!"
> I knew that another was there, invisible,
> a man from a nightmare, reading "Ulalume."
> What's meaning but vanity? A word is a sound—
> one of the handmaidens of the seraphim.
> Poe's harp-song of the House of Usher. Then the madman
> swallowed some water, came to himself, was silent.
> I was in the street. The silk of autumn was whistling. . .

(The poem is "about" an evening in St. Petersburg when the poet Vladimir Pyast went mad while reciting Poe's "Ulalume.")[6]

The Russian rhymes *abba* and has in it glorious sounds (as best as I can make out) not imitated in either translation—the third stanza begins *O domye Esherov Edgara pyela arfa,* which elegant knot of words seems to make Edgar a member of the House of Usher (an astute bit of reading on Mandelstam's part) and to give him Roderick Usher's lute (and therefore "heart-strings"). The poem is a diagram (autumn of culture, a house split down the middle, the poet possessed by prophetic meaning, a spirit lost and longed for: grief, madness, hysteria). It was written in 1913: four more years until the locomotive bearing its flags of bilious yellow and angry red would hiss into the Finland Station.

[6] Neither Clarence Brown nor Bill Merwin can spell the name which the sculptor Archipenko, at least, used to pronounce Headgear Olyan Paw. Edgar Poe incorporated into his name the name of his foster father John Allan.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mallarmé and Baudelaire learned English to read Poe; Proust learned it to read Ruskin and George Eliot. Surely it is time for us to begin Russian to read Mandelstam (and Khlebnikov and Akhmatova), for it is evident from these studies that the school of Russian poets flourishing (if that can be the word) in the Revolution and Soviet period is not merely an outgrowth of European poetry—not a branch but a new tree altogether. The Russian genius of this time could take Western matters, transform them, and give back a whole new entity.

For years it had seemed that the Bauhaus was the *fons et origo* of practically all the International Modern styles. Not so: it was the gift of modernism returned from Russia, reshaped and refined by Tatlin and Malyevich. The catenary arch now in St. Louis was designed for Red Square. These are random examples of a time of invention that counts as one of the great Renaissances in the West.

The remainder of the Twentieth Century (most miserable of ages since the Barbarians poured into Rome) might profitably be spent putting together the human achievements which tyranny has kept behind walls. Surely these are the most provincial of times.

Nadezhda Mandelstam's two volumes of memoirs would have been published in a cultural vacuum were it not for Prof. Brown's monumental study of the poet. Both books (plus the Brown-Merwin translation of some of the poems) do more than import a major poet; they *find* Mandelstam for us. There is no greater success for scholarship than to recover, establish, and interpret an unknown figure. It is a recompense for a luckless life that Mandelstam is served in posterity by two masters of prose, for the critics are already noting that Nadezhda Mandelstam is a very great writer. And Clarence Brown is a prose stylist of the first rank, if so few people might constitute a rank, for what is rarer than a scholar who can write lucid, strong, and graceful prose? He has a great deal of the Mandelstamian wit and sense of the absurd; he has the unflagging curiosity to have tracked down everything trackable down; and has mercy on the Russianless reader, and always makes allowances for him. But the triumph is to have written a book, every detail of which is new and strange to the majority of its readers, which keeps matters clear, efficiently organized, and handsomely rendered. I hope the givers of prizes are on their toes.

Mandelstam's later poems, so newly discovered, will require a second volume from Prof. Brown, and this he promises.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARVIN MUDRICK

Last Tango in Panoply

CARRYING AN INCONSPICUOUS SIGN that reads "I Am the Author of *James Joyce*," Richard Ellmann tells us as early as page 3 of this collection of essays[1] just why we don't like Boswell's *Life of Johnson* nearly as much as we think we do:

> More than anything else we want in modern biography to see the character forming, its peculiarities taking shape—but Boswell prefers to give it to us already formed. No doubt it was hard for Boswell to conceive of Dr. Johnson as a small boy in short trousers, at least until that short-trousered small boy began to translate Virgil and Homer. It is hard for us too. And primarily Boswell wants to reveal Johnson's *force* of character, while today we should ask him to disclose to us the inner compulsions, the schizoid elements—such is our modern vocabulary—which lay behind that force.

Boswell was shallow rather than deep, he couldn't ferret out and unflinchingly lay bare Johnson's *real* motives:

> A Boswell alive today would have difficulty in representing so amusingly Johnson's scorn for Scotsmen; he would feel the need to tell us the origins of this xenophobia, and much of the comedy would evaporate before cumbersome explanation. We should want to know more about Johnson's early indifference to religion, which began at the age of nine, he told Boswell, on account of his weak eyes—a curious explanation (was the prayer book badly printed?)—and continued until as a student at Oxford he happened upon William Law's *Serious Call to a Holy Life* and became religious again. This is the panoply of the mind, not its basic workings.

Sad, though, that Ellmann and the modern reader won't read Boswell a little more carefully, since they would learn that Johnson's explanation isn't at all curious or impenetrable: "I fell into an inattention to religion," he told Boswell, "or an indifference about it, in my ninth year. The church at Lichfield, in which we had a seat, wanted reparation, so I was to go and find a seat in other churches; and having bad eyes, and being awkward about this, I used to go and read in the fields on Sunday. This habit continued till my fourteenth year." In other words, the boy was so near-sighted that he balked at the prospect of stumbling over thresholds and outstretched legs in an unfamiliar church among strangers, listening to a sermon delivered by a stranger he couldn't see; so he went off to the fields with a book. As

[1] GOLDEN CODGERS, by *Richard Ellmann*. Oxford. $7.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for Johnson's attitude toward Scotsmen, any biographer who "feel[s] the need to tell us the origin of this xenophobia" will probably also feel the need to dig up the Oedipal root of Shakespeare's attitude toward rural constables or a New Yorker's relish for jokes about hillbillies. Ellmann seems to think he's tackling, if not a Hitler, at least an Ezra Pound on the Rome radio; but some of Johnson's best friends were Scotsmen (including—maybe the modern reader doesn't know—Boswell), he made an extensive and friendly tour of Scotland, nor does he anywhere in his subsequent *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* advocate genocide or restrictive quotas. (His manservant for the last thirty-two years of his life was a Jamaican Negro freedman, Francis Barber, whom he treated as a son and a friend and eventually made the residuary legatee of his not inconsiderable estate.) Johnson was a very nice man and he was fond of many men, women, and children of every race and sex and he didn't practice cannibalism or discrimination.

He may, however, have practiced some sort of physical self-mortification, reluctantly abetted, at his desperate insistence, by Mrs. Thrale (the problematic evidence has been available for a long time; Katharine Balderston's essay, which Ellmann mentions as his source, takes a more humane and less thrilled view of it than Ellmann does). Boswell, says Ellmann (who doesn't seem to be familiar with Boswell's journals), would have filed and forgotten such "unseemly" stuff, whereas "Today we want to see our great men at their worst as well as their best." Indeed the modern biographer has scarcely begun; he takes for his motto "No worst, there is none"; and he looks lyrically forward to worse and worse:

> We can claim to be more intimate, but even our intimacy shows occasional restraints, little islands of guardedness in a blunt ocean [blunt oceans differ from sharp oceans, they are muddier and more obtuse and they belch up nasty little innuendoes, they are the pet oceans of modern biographers]. We have savoured [bold oral metaphor] the emotional convolutions of Lytton Strachey's love life with Carrington and their friends, but the precise anatomical convolutions [*la bête à deux dos*] remain shrouded [peel off the pall of the past!] by the last rags of biographical decorum [let it all hang out!]. . . .

There is a new breed of literary biographer. He aims at demonstrating that every writer's private life is as unseemly as ours; that nobody is any better that he has to be; that only the writer's "conscious direction . . . gives shape to what might otherwise be his run-of-the-mill phobias or obsessions and distinguishes his grand paranoia from our squirmy ones." Ellmann himself is dean of the squirmy biographers. The pioneer work is his biography of Joyce, published fifteen years ago; other examples since are Carlos Baker on Heming-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way, Lawrance Thompson on Frost, Arthur Mizener on Ford Madox Ford. A few quotations will illustrate the method.

On page 192 of *The Saddest Story,* having surveyed the latest of Ford's accumulating personal troubles, Mizener remarks that "Ford was, as usual, broke." Ford was then thirty-five. He had already achieved a well-deserved position among the best-known men of letters of the age; he had written eleven novels; he had been Joseph Conrad's collaborator and friend; he had edited the best English literary review ever; he had been the discoverer, sponsor, and associate of the best of "*les jeunes*" (e.g. Pound, Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis); in his spare time he had had a nervous breakdown while leading an extremely complicated social and private life; he didn't gamble or make foolish investments; he worked very hard and hoped his books would sell and argued with publishers for better contracts; he was an excellent cook: but the tenured Ivy League professor, pausing for an occasional chat with his tax lawyer to maximize his profit from books about impecunious artists, is inexorable. Mozart was, as usual, broke.

The master of the method is Ellmann, who perfected it at once in his Joyce book with innumerable quick strokes of condescension and callous flippancy. Consider, for instance, the function of the epithet "lugubrious" and the phrase "with more friendliness than accuracy" in the following passage: "Joyce's activities on Sullivan's behalf were made more difficult by his fading eyesight. He had lugubrious discussions about this time with Aldous Huxley, also a victim of eye trouble, and with Thomas W. Pugh, a fellow-Dubliner who pleased him by knowing *Ulysses* and Dublin almost as intimately as he did himself. Pugh was blind in one eye, and Joyce eagerly asked his birth year, which was 1883; he then said with more friendliness than accuracy, 'We are much alike, both of us blind in one eye, and both born in the same year' " (but "we"—Ellmann, you, and I—remember that the year of Joyce's birth was 1882). Or Ellmann as dean of interior decorators: "He and Nora bought some furniture, undistinguished but comfortable." Lucia, Joyce's daughter, whom he loved dearly and spent years of his life and a great deal of his money taking from doctor to doctor throughout Europe in the hope of curing her mental illness, had just been carried off in a straitjacket to a sanitarium: "With Lucia at Ivry, Joyce had time for a new misfortune," chirps Ellmann; a few pages earlier he recorded a trip Joyce took "with the hapless Lucia in tow." Joyce's despair at his daughter's illness having overflowed in a heartbroken letter to Harriet Weaver, Ellmann comments that "Joyce had not wept in a letter since he suspected Nora of infidelity in 1909. Though not so blind as Homer, nor so exiled as Dante, he had reached his life's nadir." At such moments Ellmann may be said to have invented a new mode of swinishness. Lytton Strachey, who piqued himself on his malice, is all heart by comparison with these American professors and their corporate artillery of foundation grants,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

research assistants, unlimited access to letters and manuscripts, unlimited license to speak *ex cathedra* in huge and blackly footnoted tomes that say the official word on all the unfortunate geniuses of the twentieth century.

But Ellmann isn't content just to talk mean; now that censorship has collapsed he wants to talk both mean and dirty: such is the burden of *Golden Codgers,* and, fifteen years after *Joyce,* Ellmann shambles out for his last tango with the sniggering academic reader: "During seven years Gide and Wilde had five spurts of acquaintance," he commences the second paragraph of his essay on the Gide-Wilde relationship. On Pater the patron of sensuousness and Ruskin the puritan: "one was all infection and the other all contraception." On the prevalence of excremental images in Luther: "Psychohistorians will have to take account . . . of the possible banality of anality in Luther's time." On the phrase "boyish holiday" in Wilde's *"Hélas!"*: "A 'boyish holiday' is . . . not the most offensive way to spend one's time, especially if one likes boys" (pederasty is Ellmann's most hilarious topic). So intent is Ellmann on exposing the butterfly's private parts that he actually conducts a lengthy critique of *"Hélas!"*: regarding the terms Wilde applies to himself in the poem, Ellmann says that " 'ancient wisdom' and 'austere control'—self-congratulatory since Wilde never had either—are so vague as to constitute . . ." etc.; but the point is that *nobody,* not Epictetus or Spinoza, can apply such terms to himself, that the poem isn't so much silly or mendacious as non-existent and Ellmann is talking about nothing at all.

Now and then Ellmann's ill-will becomes in its indiscriminateness really alarming—maybe because it runs out of dirt and has to feed on thin air—as when it takes off after Arthur Symons:

> His interest in France was consolidated by a trip to Paris in 1889 with Havelock Ellis as his companion. They visited Mallarmé on one of his *mardis,* and met also Huysmans, Maeterlinck, and other prominent writers. Villiers, whom they had hoped to see, disobliged them by dying shortly before their arrival, but Symons wrote an obituary article on him for Oscar Wilde's *Woman's World* in the same year.

Whom or what does Ellmann think he is mocking? Symons's triviality in making a journey to meet prominent writers? in being accompanied by—har! har! har!—Havelock Ellis? in hoping to see Villiers? in not anticipating Villiers's death? in presuming he could make up for not meeting Villiers by writing an obituary piece about him? Is it Villiers's absurd disobligingness in dying a few days too early? What on earth *amuses* Ellmann here? And the only rational answer seems to be that Ellmann has already decided, dipping his poisoned darts, that just about the whole population out there are trivial and ridiculous whatever they do: "good sport it is to see a man

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tumble with an epilepsy, and revive and tumble again, and all this he knows not why." Two centuries ago somebody named Soame Jenyns published a moral treatise which explained that human suffering was justified because it furnished occupation and amusement, somewhere high up along the great stair of creation, for a species of beings superior to man; and Samuel Johnson, reviewing the treatise, took the opportunity to imagine this species at work and play: "Many a merry bout have these frolic beings at the vicissitudes of an ague, and good sport it is to see a man tumble with an epilepsy, and revive and tumble again, and all this he knows not why." There is no substitute for fellow-feeling. Ellmann, ambitious to do the twentieth century, ends by doing it in. Tone is the man. Unluckily Ellmann's tone, which is the pride and courage that drives him to perform his impressive labors, disfigures whatever it touches; and he doesn't understand that tone is everything.

Surprisingly, discussing Eliot and Pound in the final essay of *Golden Codgers,* Ellmann chickens out and is altogether respectful, he even writes pretty well. The essay considers the first draft of *The Waste Land,* and pays the proper tribute to Pound by documenting his indispensable services to the poem. Surely, for instance, if Pound's advice to delete such lines as these had not been followed—

> Fresca slips softly to the needful stool,
> Where the pathetic tale of Richardson
> Eases her labour till the deed is done . . . .
> This ended, to the steaming bath she moves,
> Her tresses fanned by little flutt'ring Loves;
> Odours, confected by the cunning French,
> Disguise the good old hearty female stench . . .

—if Eliot had held out for such pseudo-Swiftian hysteria (erupting through the neo-Popean façade), the poem could hardly have imposed itself as the credo of a generation; and it might well have appeared to be what Eliot himself irritably called it a generation later: "a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life." And of course against women. The first draft of *The Waste Land* testifies stunningly—and recalls the less obvious evidence of the other poems—that Eliot's reputation depends on what was omitted from his poems. (If, on the other hand, he had put it all back and said it in his own unaltered voice, his poems would have been quite a different matter from the gnomic unpleasantnesses bequeathed to us by the Nobel Laureate.) Ellmann is interested enough in the Eliot-Pound collusion to keep his eye on the object and a civil tongue in his head; the essay is a responsible one. As Ellmann might sum it up: Though neither panoply nor basic workings, it's Ellmann's book's comfortable if undistinguished little zenith, without more than a spurt or two of his squirmy impudence.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HAYDEN CARRUTH

Poetry Chronicle

WHICH PHASE OF H. D.'S POETRY ONE LIKES best is perhaps a matter of taste. All her work is of a very superior, possibly the most superior, order, transcending questions of merely technical success or failure; this much is clear. Hence one's judgment rests on intangibles and is subjective and variable. For my part her early poems have sometimes seemed *too* well written and *too* exactly conceived to be altogether convincing—since perfection of a kind does verge on preciosity—while her late poems, searching deeper into the configurations of her private spiritual and cultural vision, have seemed too specialized, though this last is surely a function of the literary epoch and not of the poems themselves: one has simply been subjected to more of these great mythological collocations than one can absorb, each with its new burden of the unknown and its straining for coherence. I have preferred her war-time poems. Now, having just reread them, I feel justified in my preference, though I emphasize that it is not a point I should wish to insist on and that all her poems, when looked at from another angle of vision, undoubtedly do make a consistent progression from first to last, in spite of the gaps of time which occurred in her writing of them.

At all events the three war-time poems have now been published in one volume, *Trilogy,* as she wished them to be.[1] It contains *The Walls Do Not Fall* (originally published in 1944), *Tribute to the Angels* (1945), and *The Flowering of the Rod* (1946). Some readers have said that the third of these books is not only different from the other two but conceptually weaker than they, so that the three together are not quite a proper trilogy. And I suppose (with a sigh for such critical finicality) an argument can be made to support this view. In *The Flowering of the Rod* H. D. did become involved in a rather elaborate fiction on biblical themes; I do not mean a poetic fiction, though it is that too, but an actual story; and it is a story which seems not only elaborate but poetically unnecessary—she could have accomplished what she appears to have wanted and what her poem appears to have demanded in simpler, more lyrical ways. But whatever merit this argument may have it can be easily set aside, and I think it should be. How can we impose what "appears" to us—something that might have been—upon the actuality of the poet's mind here on her page? The three poems, written so closely after one another, written with great speed and in the heat of a particular

[1] TRILOGY, by *H. D. (Hilda Doolittle).* New Directions. $6.95; $2.25.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moment of vision, make a complex but single thrust of the poet's imagination, and they are well enough integrated; if by nothing else, then by the quality of her writing.

There is a spell, for instance,
in every sea-shell:

continuous, the sea thrust
is powerless against coral,

bone, stone, marble
hewn from within by that craftsman,

the shell-fish:
oyster, clam, mollusc

is master-mason planning
the stone marvel:

yet that flabby, amorphous hermit
within, like the planet

senses the finite,
it limits its orbit

of being, its house,
temple, fane, shrine:

it unlocks the portals
at stated intervals:

prompted by hunger,
it opens to the tide-flow:

but infinity? no,
of nothing-too-much:

I sense my own limit,
my shell-jaws snap shut

at invasion of the limitless,
ocean-weight; infinite water

can not crack me, egg in egg-shell;
closed in, complete, immortal

full-circle, I know the pull
of the tide, the lull

as well as the moon;
the octopus-darkness

is powerless against
her cold immortality;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so I in my own way know
that the whale

can not digest me:
be firm in your own small, static, limited

orbit and the shark-jaws
of outer circumstance

will spit you forth:
be indigestible, hard, ungiving,

so that, living within,
you beget, self-out-of-self,

selfless,
that pearl-of-great-price.

Were ever the details of molluscan biology represented in verse of such purity? The eighteenth century would have gaped in wonder. Yet this is no more than the beginning of what H. D. did in this passage, which comes near the opening of *The Walls Do Not Fall*; it is an extended metaphor, apt in every feature, yet is also in fact much more than metaphor, since it draws together the strands of meaning and feeling of the whole poem. It is myth in action, in generation; and yet—

no poetic fantasy
but a biological reality,

a fact: I am an entity
like bird, insect, plant

or sea-plant cell;
I live; I am alive;

take care, do not know me,
deny me, do not recognize me,

shun me; for this reality
is infectious—ecstasy.

And this ecstasy, ecstasy *in* language, in *beautiful* language, is what carries me through the entire trilogy, not only content with her tricks —such as her false etymological association of Hebrew *amen* with Egyptian *Amen*, terms which actually have no connection and mean virtually the opposite of one another—not only content with these obvious high-handed fictions but enchanted with her whole poem, not to say enraptured. Because though I may, with H. D., inveigh

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

often enough against "rhyme, jingle,/overworked assonance, nonsense," in desperate loathing of the poet's word-trap, yet I come back, with her again, to these same poetic instruments, knowing they are all I have, paradoxically, to help me find real meaning, "the meaning that words hide." H. D. believed that this meaning was the "spiritual reality" which appears only sporadically in private intuition but steadily and clearly in the written records of all western religious experience. And only this, she said (and *proved*, at least poetically), can sustain men and women in a time of grief and danger.

In short, writing under the pressure of war in London, the bombs falling around her, H. D. brought together all her powers in one marvelous synthesis: her verbal power in its superbly workable maturity, her spiritual and cognitive powers, the power of her concern for the humanity of the world. If she said things about the "holiness" of the "scribe" which I as a young man in that same war learned to distrust and fear, she nevertheless grounded them firmly in the actuality of the human condition; and in doing so she created one of the great works of her time in poetry. It has been out of print for many years. Now its publication in one volume is an event to be celebrated by us all.

After this, the rest of the books I have chosen to write about this quarter must seem distinctly secondary, and they do.[2] But if I have not been deeply moved by them, I have often been pleased and, as Marianne Moore used to say, "benefited." Diane Wakoski has seemed to me one of the most interesting poets of the past decade. Her language usually leaves me cold—perhaps because I have never heard her read her poems aloud, nor for that matter any other poets reading theirs, and indeed I know little about the aspects of oral performance that have influenced poetry so decisively in recent years—but her mind and sensibility are alive, acute, and original. Her new book, *Dancing on the Grave of a Son of a Bitch*—and what a title! magnificent, though the book is by no means as triumphant as this might suggest—is a somewhat random collection, perhaps not up to the level of previous work, but it contains good poems. Wakoski has a way of beginning her poems with the most unpromising materials imaginable, then carrying them on, often on and on, talkily, until at the end they come into surprising focus, unified works. With her it is a question of thematic and imagistic control, I think; her poems

[2] DANCING ON THE GRAVE OF A SON OF A BITCH, by *Diane Wakoski*. Black Sparrow Press. $4.00. THE PORTRAITS & THE POSES, by *Edwin Brock*. New Directions. $6.95; $2.25. WHAT I WANT, by *Kathleen Fraser*. Harper & Row. $5.95. ON OCCASION, by *Joel Oppenheimer*. Bobbs-Merrill. $4.95. THE DEATH NOTEBOOKS, by *Anne Sexton*. Houghton Mifflin. $5.95. THE CREATION FRAME, by *Phyllis Thompson*. University of Illinois Press. $5.95. I'M NOT YOUR LAUGHING DAUGHTER, by *Ellen Bass*. University of Massachusetts Press. $7.00. THE ARRIVANTS: A NEW WORLD TRILOGY, by *Edward Brathwaite*. Oxford. $3.50. MERCIFUL DISGUISES, by *Mona Van Duyn*. Atheneum. $10.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are deeply, rather than verbally, structured. Here is a poem called "Looking for Rabbit Tracks on the Freeway" (titles, titles!—whatever else, the lady is a bibliographic genius):

the
what-
way?
The Free-
way.

What is freedom?

When the rabbit can leave his tracks
and you still cant find him,
that's freedom.

And I remember a man
we all loved
who could walk in the woods
even in the city
tracking animals

but he was not free,
was haunted
by the idea of the night,
haunted by too many voices, mostly
his own.
Moved to the woods
and there
never saw a rabbit.

I drive alone at night.
I tilt the rim of the world.
The lights are like radishes in a bowl.
My foot is a cabbage/
lettuce flutters across my wrists.
The moon
leaves its light
behind
and the cars rake it up
like mulch to cover the night plants.

When I am with you,
I think . . .
Then remember,
that I never will be
again.

Freedom?
What is that?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When you are alone
and no one notices?
Another word
for
the moon?

Edwin Brock is a poet of another kind entirely. His first book published in this country, *Invisibility Is the Art of Survival,* seemed to me the best thing we had had from England in years, a subdued and humble toughness of sensibility in language very free yet preserving a sense of tradition. Now his new book, *The Portraits & The Poses,* seems not quite as good, but it contains fine poems. One of the best is a poem (originally published in this magazine) in the death-of-animals convention that is so superior in its working out that I think it must take a place very near the head of that convention. It is called "Fox at Winterton":

All night the gale
had brought glass
wood and bodies
from the sea
using sand to make
a decent burial

leaving the beach
as ordered as
an Escher cemetery
each mound a mystery
except where a wing
or beak broke through
like weed.

I gave each one
a casual rite
dispensing death
like a clergyman
until I stopped
at a shape
as shocking as
a scream in church:

its red fur
stained with sand,
its head was chewed
into a fanged skull
and ten inches of rope
grew from its spine

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

yet enough of fox
remained to make
me flinch
expecting the massacre
to jump and snap and
infect my clean skin
with God knows what wounds

even walking away
I looked back
unless its stumps
stalked me along the beach:

not until another month
of tides had turned
its tame bones
would I accept it.

This creature contained
so much life
its death shrieked,
shaming the quiet cough
that takes us
so barely alive
the air settles
where we were
without a sound.

Obviously Brock has learned something from recent American writing; but he has also learned a good deal, I think, from Edwin Muir, and that is the aspect of his work, the British aspect, which makes it particularly useful to us in America.

The recent poetry of Kathleen Fraser seems to me pure solipsism.

That didn't come down
        but quietly (to touch)
        as wheat grows. And shoes
in water. Here. A curving brown light
didn't drop down all around
        no center.
        No field where that touch seems
firm, almost.

I am sure this, which is a whole poem, means something to her. Its words and figures have a function in her vision; their weighted syntax tells us as much. Consequently we have no right to object to the poem as a private action. After all we have been talking for some time about the need for poetry to seek responsibility in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

creation of selfhood. And perhaps we can dimly perceive something in the poem if we look hard enough, a kind of mystical-sexual non-experience; but that is guesswork, arbitrary at best, of no use to us. It takes more than syntax to give these private figures a public emotional weight. The time has come to reassert a complementary principle to the self-creative function of art, namely, that the finished work of art exists only in a reciprocating action. Our concepts of the esthetic and the communal are inseparable; neither can take form without the other. This is why a poem can never be a dream, though it may draw sustenance from a dream. A poem which can exist only within the creating selfhood is to my mind not a poem at all, not a functioning work of art. At best it is only an artistic intention. But Fraser's new book, *What I Want,* contains, in addition to this recent work, selections from her three earlier books, including many erotic poems that seem to me not only individual but fully present as poems-in-the-world, and some of them are good poems. I hope she will find her way to a synthesis that includes the sensible mutuality of this earlier work.

Joel Oppenheimer's *On Occasion* is a charming book of modest, simple verses written for the births, deaths, weddings, and anniversaries of his relatives and friends. His writing is prosy and casual, not good for quoting in small excerpts, but most of his poems are real poems, contained in their own terms. They are occasional, as his title declares, but not fragmentary. Beyond this there isn't much to say about them. I suppose a large part of their virtue lies in the sweetness and tranquillity of Oppenheimer's own being, as manifested in poems that dare to be direct. And I must say I was delighted to find this directness amidst so much other writing that is strained and muddy.

In Anne Sexton's *The Death Notebooks* there is a good deal of the same chic diction and glib irony that to my mind vitiated the energy of many of her earlier poems. Indeed I have always thought it a great pity that she could not break through this self-consciousness more often, because her energy was clearly there to be tapped, along with intelligence and humane concern, though at the same time her self-consciousness was understandable—and more!—to those of us who have shared her topic: the experience of emotional illness. The important point is that in all her books at least a few poems have made it; they have broken through. Sometimes she has succeeded by converting self-consciousness of style to a genuine formal attribute, at other times by smashing artifice in the heat of feeling. Her new book is no exception, and is well worth having for its few real poems. One that struck me especially is "The Fury of Guitars and Sopranos":

> This singing
> is a kind of dying,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a kind of birth,
a votive candle.
I have a dream-mother
who sings with her guitar,
nursing the bedroom
with moonlight and beautiful olives.
A flute came too,
joining the five strings,
a God finger over the holes.
I knew a beautiful woman once
who sang with her fingertips
and her eyes were brown
like small birds.
At the cup of her breasts
I drew wine.
At the mound of her legs
I drew figs.
She sang for my thirst,
mysterious songs of God
that would have laid an army down.
It is as if a morning-glory
had bloomed in her throat
and all that blue
and small pollen
ate into my heart
violent and religious.

Phyllis Thompson is a quieter poet, more tempered, more formal. She can write beautifully sometimes in terms of word and phrase, cadence and line, but too often I read her poems with a feeling that something is lacking, some controlling image or idea that could draw the poems together and make them convincing. I don't mean her poems are exercises, not at all. They appear to spring from genuine experience. Rather it is as if experience itself, in its utter randomness, had overwhelmed and subdued imagination. And in the absence of imagination the poems tend to become wordy. In her new book, *The Creation Frame,* Thompson has a number of poems about Hawaii that are effective, and one other, "Waiting for Snow," a poem about trees in a New England winter, that I particularly like, though it is too long to quote in full. Here are a few lines from the middle:

I think it was not the cruelty of the season
Made them stand like this without stirring.
For they answered with anger the ruinous wind
That fell on them early this month under the humped moon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stripping their leaves.
They are not now submissive.
It's open they are, and passive.
The way they wait is like the way they wore their green
In the sweet, warm air of summer,
All that abundance not alien to them . . .

But even here she could do without "sweet, warm" and "All" in the last two lines.

In recent years the objectivist passion has overtaken many young poets to such a degree that I think it has made them mindless—or worse, spiritless. They forget that Williams Carlos Williams' little observations of wheelbarrows or his notes to his wife take esthetic and moral value from their context in his whole work, which was so much more than observation and notes. Ellen Bass, a young poet whose first book, *I'm Not Your Laughing Daughter,* is a case in point, gives us page after page of toneless fact, some of it interesting—her trip to Japan, for instance—and some of it cleanly written, but none of it in the least poetic, using the term, of course, in its full artistic meaning. Perhaps this is a good place to repeat something that Denise Levertov wrote a few years ago when she was discussing the common American verse style of the late 1960s; it should be hammered on the door of every creative writing school in the country (though God knows if it would do any good):

> What began as a healthy reaction, a turning away with relief from sterile academic rhetorics, has proliferated in an unexampled production of *notations:* poems which tell of things seen or done, but which, lacking the focus of that energetic, compassionate, questioning spirit that infused even the most fragmentary of Williams's poems, do not impart a sense of the experiencing of seeing or doing, or of the *value* of such experience. . . . [And this] lack of a unifying intelligence, of the implicit presence of an interpreting spirit behind the notation, is associated—and not accidentally—with a lack of music.

To anyone who has read even a little of the enormous mass of recent poetry the perfect justice of Levertov's criticism will be evident. The poetry is full of objective detail—stones, stones, stones, all lying there inert. I would admonish Ellen Bass and her cohorts: yes, be objective by all means, it is in its way essential, but do not expect your poems to succeed unless you can say, with Pound: "The stone is alive in my hands."

To convey a sense of the quality of Edward Brathwaite's poetry is difficult. Let me suggest a distinction between poetry that is moving and poetry that is stirring. I have already said that H. D.'s poems

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are the former kind; Brathwaite's are the latter. I don't mean like a Sousa march either, though I've no objection to Sousa. It is a question of vigor and a certain fibrous resiliency. Brathwaite, who is the foremost poet of the English-speaking Caribbean and at least in some sense a revolutionary, is never shrill, is always keen to the pathos of his people's plight, yet the basic exuberance of his feeling cannot be doubted. In part it is revolutionary optimism, in part a closeness to his sources in folk culture. Brathwaite has said that the chief literary influence on his work has been the poetry of T. S. Eliot, but if this is so it has been an influence almost entirely limited to matters of organization and structure, and perhaps to Eliot's manner of rhyming, though this could have come from anywhere. In texture, in verbal technique, in almost everything, nothing could be further from Eliot's poetry than Brathwaite's. Brathwaite has made his reputation on three long poems, *Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968), and *Islands* (1969). Now they have been published in one volume, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy,* and it is a book everyone should read. Brathwaite uses many voices, ranging from standard English to dialects of several kinds, and in many rhythms, from subdued free cadence to calypso. Not all passages are equally successful; sometimes his jazz tempos remind us too much of Lindsay's "Congo" or his dialect slips too far toward the type of Auden's ballads. But in general he has been remarkably successful in reproducing black speech patterns, both African and Caribbean, in English syntax, using the standard techniques of contemporary poetry, and he has been equally successful in suggesting to an international audience the cultural identities and attitudes of his own people. To my mind his best writing is in *Masks,* a poem which explores the poet's longing to discover his own roots in the culture and history of the Ashanti Federation, written as a consequence of his living and working in Ghana for a number of years. In the end his seeking was, and had to be, a failure, as he acknowledges, but it produced magnificent poetry.

Whose gold you carry, camel,
in this cold cold world?
Whose pearls of great price?
Whose cinnamon, whose spice?

Your world of walls, o city
of my birth, rises so certain
so secure; the plains
of dust surrounding us

so kept away, so distant.
Whose gold you carry, camel,
on your hill-top back? . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So that with new warm arms the forest holds us.
From this womb'd heaven comes the new curled god
with goblin old man's grinning, flat face smiling,
crouched like a frog with monkey hands and
insect fingers. This we will carve and carry
with our cooking pots, wood mud and wattle;
symbol sickness fetish for our sickness.
For man eats god, eats life, eats world, eats wickedness.
This we now know, this we digest and hold;
this gives us bone and sinews, saliva grease and sweat;
this we can shit. And that no doubt will ever hit
us, the worm's mischance defeat us, dark roots
of time move in our way to trip us; look, we dance . . .

The path through gloom, dark
drip-

ping through star-
wet leaves' crevices,

will not soon
turn to light, set

like a square window; will not let
in the free sail of night's moon

that voyages the Arab's roomy
heaven.

Here green's net sticks
wet, clings soft sweet comfort cunning

like Ananse's tune-
less, once Onyame's, trap of doom . . .

Takoradi was hot.
Green struggled through red
as we landed.

Laterite lanes drifted off
into dust
into silence.

Mammies crowded with cloths,
flowered and laughed;
white teeth
smooth voices like pebbles
moved by the sea of their language.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Akwaaba they smiled
meaning welcome

akwaaba they called
aye kooo

well have you walked
have you journeyed

welcome . . .

But there is no way to suggest in a small space the density, variety, wisdom, and fervor of Brathwaite's poems. I hope these excerpts will show that he is a poet of real accomplishment by any standards, to whom we must give not only our attention but our admiration.

I end with Mona Van Duyn's *Merciful Disguises,* and I beg forgiveness for having used up my allotted space with quotations from other poets. But Van Duyn's work is well known now, and much applauded. Her new book is in effect her collected poems, since it contains large selections from her previous books plus a section of new poems. Again this is a poet whose consciously literary manner has sometimes put me off in the past. But I do not wish to be ungenerous, for in this case it is a manner that seems natural and spontaneous, and moreover it is spun out without a flaw, perfectly consistent from beginning to end. My pencil is as itchy as any old-time editor's and I have made many marks in most of the other books considered here, but none in hers. And surely there is a place in the world for her kind of civility and very acute intelligence, if we can slow down long enough to perceive them. I hope so at any rate, because I have enjoyed reading much of her book, including such new poems as "The Fear of Flying" and "The Cities of the Plain."

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

The Ontario Review: A North American Journal of the Arts will appear biannually, beginning with the Fall 1974 issue, and welcomes submissions. There will be an emphasis upon poetry and fiction, but the editors are also interested in essays that deal with twentieth-century American and Canadian writers and artists, especially those who have not received much critical attention in the past.

RAYMOND SMITH, Editor

Windsor, Ontario
Canada

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New from Columbia

MADAME VESTRIS AND THE LONDON STAGE

WILLIAM W. APPLETON

Madame Vestris (1797-1856) won fame as an actress and as manager of such theatres as Covent Garden and the Lyceum, where she initiated significant reforms and set production standards which helped to alter the course of English theatre. Based on extensive research in the United States, England, and France, this study examines the forty-year span of Madame Vestris' public career against the broad and colorful background of the nineteenth-century London theatre. It chronicles her intriguing private life as well, from early scandal and success to ultimate tragedy. Illustrated. $9.95

LETTERS OF HART CRANE AND HIS FAMILY

THOMAS S. W. LEWIS, Editor

Complete texts of all the extant correspondence between Crane and his mother, father, and maternal grandmother, providing an unparalleled view of the tortured poet's relationship with his family and of the forces which affected his personal and poetic development. $20.00

COLUMBIA ESSAYS ON MODERN WRITERS

GEORGE STADE, Series Editor

Four new titles in this outstanding series: **Émile Zola,** by Jean-Albert Bédé; **Jean Cocteau,** by William Fifield; **André Malraux,** by Wilbur M. Frohock; and **Georg Trakl,** by Maire J. Kurrik. Paperbound, each $1.00

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS

Address for orders: 136 South Broadway, Irvington, New York 10533

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY

ROCKSPRING

A NOVEL BY R.G.Vliet

"The lyric poet is very much in evidence in this novella of idyllic first love."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

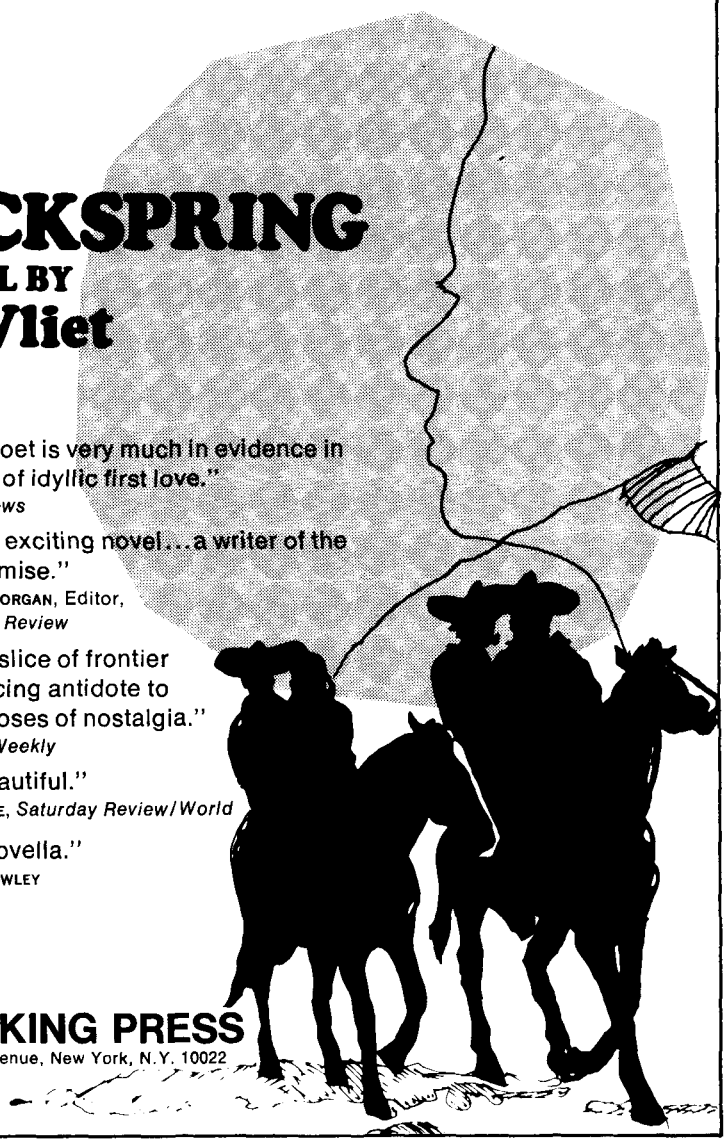
"A brilliant, exciting novel...a writer of the highest promise."
—FREDERICK MORGAN, Editor, *The Hudson Review*

"An earthy slice of frontier life...a bracing antidote to ritualized doses of nostalgia."
—*Publishers Weekly*

"Simply beautiful."
—WILLIAM COLE, *Saturday Review/World*

"A lovely novella."
—MALCOLM COWLEY

$5.95



THE VIKING PRESS
625 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED